DARTMOOR IDYLLS

BY

S. BARING GOULD

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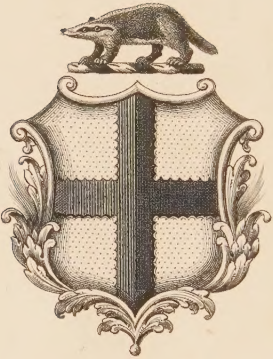

Philip Broke.

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DARTMOOR IDYLLS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

In the Roar of the Sea
The Queen of Love
Cheap Jack Zita
Mrs. Curgenven of Curgenven
Arminell
Jacquetta
Urith
Kitty Alone
Margery of Quether
Noémi
The Broom-Squire

DARTMOOR IDYLLS

BY

S. BARING-GOULD

METHUEN & CO.
36, ESSEX STREET, W.C.
LONDON
1896

Richard Clay & Sons, Limited,
London & Bungay.

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JOHN AND JOAN

I

It did not get into the papers.

If, now, the story of John and Joan's adventures during the memorable blizzard of 1891 does appear in print it will not concern that couple, for neither of them is a reader, for the very good reason that neither of them can read at all.

That is something for a man and a woman to be able to plume themselves upon in these days of advanced education.

But, although John and Joan are not able to read, and likewise unable to write, they are the joint authors of a literary production which will outlast our century, and that also is more than most authors can say in these days of ephemeral publications.

This production was written at the dictation of John and Joan. It was not impressed on paper with printers' ink, but was inscribed on a slate slab with a graving-tool.

This work was composed and engraved some ten years ago, and, although in 1891 it was slightly added to, it has not been completed and published yet. Its completion and publication are dependent on a contingency which has, happily, not yet taken place. In a word, this literary achievement—the result of the intellectual efforts of John and Joan—is their tombstone, which is preserved in their cottage, and is there conned daily by them. Neither knows the letters of the alphabet, yet both can read what is written on the headstone, for they know what the lines and curves and dots are intended to represent. In March, 1891, the monumental inscription stood thus:—

Sacred to the Memory
OF
JOHN AND JOAN NOBLE,
Who were born the same day,
Baptised the same day,
Confirmed the same day,
Entered service the same day,
Were married the same day,
And became parents simultaneous.
They died

"They were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in death they were not divided."—2 SAM. i. 23.

The cutter of the headstone—"monumental engraver" he entitled himself—had some difficulty with John and Joan over his work. They were ungrammatical. They were unreasonable.

As instance of ungrammaticality they desired to have the sentence run, "Who *was* born the same day," &c.

"'Was,'" observed the sculptor, "is unusual, to put it mildly; to put it strongly, is wrong. 'Was' is singular."

"But our story is both coorious and singular."

"You are two individuals, separate personalities, and, therefore, must be spoken of with a *were*."

"We are one," said John. "Scriptur saith so. They two is one flesh. You can't go against Scriptur, Mr. Tomkins."

"But you were not married when you were born, so must be spoken of in the plural then."

"There's argiment in that," said John, rubbing his head. "What do'y say to that, Joan? Shall we pass it? Anyhow, we was lovers from the cradle; and set down, Mr. Tomkins, as we was inocculated together."

"You surely are not going to have that inscribed?"

"Why not? It's a terrible coorious story. Yes, Joan and me was inocculated together. It was in a drawer of an old cheffonier with brass mountings. And it wasn't small-pox at all: it turned out to be chicken-pox with both of us: that was coorious."

To understand this statement it is necessary to know what the term "inoculation" meant among the peasantry of the West of England till vaccination became compulsory.

When a child had small-pox, another child was put into the crib with it, and kept there till infected with the disorder. If the crib were too small to accommodate two infants, then a lower drawer of a chest was taken and converted into a temporary bed with blankets and pillows, and the children were placed therein. That was "inoculation." There is hardly an old man or old woman in the West who was not thus inoculated in infancy.

"You are surely not going to have this on your monument!" again deprecated the sculptor.

"Why not? It's fack. But, though 'twas chicken-pox, Joan and me got pitted, each at the top-end of our noses. You may look and convince yourself."

After much persuasion and representation that he was acting against his own interests in advising an omission, inasmuch as payment was at the rate of twopence per letter, Mr. Tomkins induced the old couple to allow him to omit the record of their inoculation.

"We was married the same day," proceeded John.

"Of course you were," said the monumental artist. "You married each other."

"Whom else should we marry? We was lovers since we was babies. And we were both twenty-one to a day. Now that also was coorious. And our Martha was born on the twenty-ninth of January, and so me and Joan became parents the same day."

"Naturally—she was your child."

"But it was on the same day."

"Surely this is not to go down on the stone?"

"Yes, it is. Our story is uncommon coorious, if you take it all together. But if you leave out this and you leave out that, you just spoil the whole thing. You must take it all or leave it alone."

"It is arrant nonsense," said the sculptor. "This comes of lack of education."

"I suppose it does," said John modestly. "But we be both too old to alter, and I reckon it be possible to enter Life Eternal wi'out A B C. We have made up our minds what is to go on the stone, and we can pay for it, so have it we will."

"Very well," said the artist, "if that be the case, you shall have your own way, but you may tear me with wild horses before I write that you each have a chicken-pox pit on the ends of your noses. I'll do the stone for you, but I forewarn you: I will not append my name at the bottom of the monument. I should be ashamed to do so—to have such nonsense with 'Tomkins' at the foot."

Then Joan flushed very red, and said, "We want to have no other name on our stone. Put John there, and put Joan there, and nothing else. We was lovely and pleasant in our lives, and in death we want no Tomkinses at the foot nor nowhere about us."

One concession—one further concession the couple did make. John had desired to have it recorded on the headstone that he and his wife became parents the same day, but Tomkins had pleaded for the word "simultaneous." Then, after consultation with Joan, the point was conceded. "You see, old woman, we've been down on Tomkins rather hard; we won't let him stick his name on our moni'ment, so we'll just humour him in this particular, and let him write 'simultaneous' to ease his feelings."

In course of time, Martha, the only child of the Nobles, married, and followed her husband, a moorman, to his home—a cottage, or small farm, distant, as the crow flies and the moorman rides, eight miles, but by road—the only road—as much as seventeen.

Martha in turn became a mother, "which makes it all the more coorious," said John, "for now Joan and me be grandparents the same day, or, as Tomkins and the headstone says, 'simultaneous.' "

Martha did not recover her strength after the baby was born. She was unable to nurse her child, and was not vigorous enough to both manage her husband's house and attend to the child. Accordingly her mother came to her aid, and carried off the baby. At the time when our story took place the babe—his name was Frederick Augustus—was with his grandparents.

II

John and Joan occupied a lonely moorland cottage, or small moor-farm, far from village and hamlet. To the east rose heathery ranges of hills two thousand feet high, crowned with pointed and weathered granite rocks.

The cottage was built of rude blocks, and was thatched with heather. The windows were small, and filled with green bullseye glass. Around it were fields cleared of stones for hay, a potato paddock, and sheds.

The day was Monday, March 9, 1891.

John and Joan were engaged on their midday meal, with the door open, for the weather was warm, when they heard a shrill call.

"There's Whistle-Jack!" said Joan; "whatever can ha' brought him here?"

"Whistles, I reckon," answered John. "I'll buy one to amuse the baby."

"Whistles!" exclaimed Joan. "What be you a-thinking of, John? If you was to blow one, it would frighten the child into fits."

"They cost a penny and no more," said John. "But there he be. Come in, Jack Narracot, and share a bite wi' us: a mouthful o' potato pie and a mug o' cider."

The man addressed stood in the doorway. He was tall, gaunt, halted on one leg, wore very ragged garments, and whistles were stuck into every available button-hole, and under the ribbon of his discoloured hat.

John Narracot, or Whistle-Jack, as he was called, picked up a livelihood by combining many avocations. He made brooms. He sheared sheep. He trapped moles. He thatched cottages and ricks. He composed verses. He was a ratcatcher. He was credited with being a poacher. Finally, he made and sold whistles. Broom-cutting time was in winter. Mole-catching in April. Shearing time in June. Patent poisons were exterminating rats. Galvanised iron roofing was abolishing thatch. The advance of civilisation was reducing the means of making a livelihood to Whistle-Jack. Poems Jack composed at all times of the year and on all kinds of occasions. No birth, marriage, burial took place uncommemorated by him, and he was rewarded for his verses according to the circumstances of the family in whose honour the poem was made. But Board-school education and the Press were reducing the number of those who cared to hear the rude compositions of Narracot, and literature was so cheap that his efforts no longer met with the remuneration to which he had been accustomed in former days.

"I've brought you a letter," said the man of many trades. "Her's been lying at Millard Horne's these two days. Saturday they was too busy, Sunday too idle to attend and send her on. Here she be. I was passing, so they axed me to take the letter. No charge for postage, but what you please to give. And, maybe, you'll buy a whistle or two."

"I'll have a whistle, certainly," said John. "Sit down and eat hearty. The letter will keep. I reckon it's about nothing, and is an advertisement. Joan and I be no scholars, and we'll wait till you've eaten. Then you can read 'n to us."

"We shall have a change of weather," said the man, complying with the invitation, and falling to with an appetite.

"That we shall," said Joan. "The horniwinks (peewits) have left the moor. They've been going by all morning in flocks like sparrows."

"I know it," said John. "For I was down by Rediver wood, and the rooks were tumbling about as if they didn't know their heads from their tail-feathers."

"I know it by my whistles," observed Narracot. "They alter their pipe according as the weather is. When there is rain coming they're in a sort o' a minor key, and when the wind is up in north or east and there'll be dryth, then they sing shrill as larks."

"There ought to be a change," said John. "All February we've had summer heat and sunshine, and I reckon it ain't rooks only as don't know their heads from their tails. It's the same wi' the seasons o' the year. They be all tumbling about like tipsy creeturs."

"I've been compoging poetry concerning you," said Whistle-Jack, leaning his elbows on the board.

"Concerning me or Joan?"

"Concerning both. You've been married fifty years, and my poem says so. It begins—

'’Tis fifty years, my old wife Joan,
’Tis fifty years to-day,
Since we was wed——'"

"We ha' been married fifty years next Thursday," said John; "then Joan and me will be seventy-one to a day."

"Will you hear the poem now?"

"No, thank y'. 'Tisn't true yet. Not till Thursday. To-day be fifty years short by three days, and there's no saying what may hap between this and then. It'd be tempting Providence. But now, will you be so good and read us the letter. Joan and me be no scholars, but us be terrible good listeners."

The letter was from their married daughter, Martha Evea; and it was as follows—

"DEAR FATHER AND MOTHER BOTH—

"Hopping as it will find you as it leaves me, bad in my legs as swells up like illifunts. There ain't been no washing done this fortnight, which is bad, and ort to be. I wish mother would come and do the washing for me. If I fusses about them legs swells, so dear mother do come, hopping as it finds you as it leaves me. I hopp the dear baby is well.

"Your loving dorter,

"MARTHA."

III

"Whatever is to be done?" asked John.

"I must go at once. It's two weeks' washing."

"I'd put it off," advised Whistle-Jack. "There may be a change o' weather, and it's seventeen miles to the Eveas'."

"It's eight across the moors," answered Joan.

"Aye, but I wouldn't chance it wi' a change coming on."

"There'll be no change afore midnight. And it's two weeks' washing."

"I can't be sure when the change will be," observed Narracot. "Them pipes be squealin' like little pigs when you've nipped their tails."

"You said yourself they squealed for a north or east wind, and with north or east wind we get dry weather."

"That's true; but there's a queer change coming. They squeals wonderful irreg'lar. Will you hear them?"

"No, thank y'. It would wake the baby."

"I'll buy one of them whistles," said John. "Here's a penny."

"Will you?" said Joan, and she snatched the purchase out of her husband's hand. "Not if I can help it. Anyhow you sha'n't keep the whistle. I'm off to Martha. Whilst I'm away you must mind the baby, and pretty noise you'd be making, John, with the whistle! scaring the poor mite out of his senses. I'd come back to find him a raving idjot."

Joan put the whistle into her pocket.

"It's safest there," she said; "and so I shall be easy in mind that John bain't playing no anticks on it."

"But you're not going now to the Eveas'?" asked Narracot.

"Yes, I be," replied Joan. "When a daughter calls—and has a fortnight's washing—a mother answers."

"It's a rough road over the moor."

"It's no road at all, but so long as there's daylight I can find my way. The moors be middling dry. The bogs are shrumped up. The rivers without water. If I start at once, I shall be at Martha's by nightfall, and begin the washing early to-morrow."

"I don't half like it," said John. "It's dangerous in the Cleave."

"Pshaw!" said Joan. "I know the Cleave. I have a foot as firm as yours, John, and a head as cool and an eye as clear. Was we not born the same day and inocculated together?"

"I'll come with you."

"You can't. You must attend to the baby."

"I dare say Whistle-Jack would do that."

"Whistle-Jack," said the wife, "he ain't competent. He's never been a married man nor a nussin' father."

"If you will go," said John, "then take one of our cured hams for Martha, and a bottle of our own metheglin. The metheglin is strong as brandy four years old, and sweet as the furze-bloom from which the bees draw their honey. Martha 'll come round, and the swellin' go down in her legs, on our ham and metheglin."

"I'll do that, but it's a good deal to carry."

"It will be worth it," said John, "and I dare say Whistle-Jack will carry 'em part way."

"I'd rather carry it myself and go my own way. Jack's a bit of a cripple. I'm lusty and strong, though Thursday I be seventy-one, I feel like a girl o' sixteen."

"And you'll be back on Thursday?"

"I'll be sure to be that, even if I have to go again."

"Yes," said Narracot, "you'll mind to be home, for I shall come again on Thursday, and recite to you that poem o' mine I have compoged on your fifty years of married life. It begins—

> ''Tis fifty years, my old wife Joan,
> 'Tis fifty years to-day.'"

"I'll hear it on Thursday. I've no time for it now, if I'm to be at the Eveas' by nightfall."

Then the old woman began to make preparations for departure. She wrapped in a bundle certain garments, also simples for Martha's legs, to reduce swelling, the ham, and the bottle of metheglin, than which no cordial made by Carthusians in the Dauphiné Alps could be more effective. Next she summoned her husband to consultation over the baby's cradle.

"Now mind," said Joan, "I trust Frederick Augustus to you. If harm comes on him, I'll never kiss you again."

"You don't think you could carry him along with you?" suggested the old man. "You see, the minding o' babies don't come so nat'ral to men as it does to females."

"See how selfish these men are!" exclaimed Joan, appealing to the whistle-man. "As if it were not enough to have to carry a ham and a bottle o' metheglin, but he wants me to take the baby as well, so as to leave him to get into mischief, having nothing to do."

"I'll do my best," said John, humbly, "but it don't come nat'ral."

"If I leave the baby with you," said the old woman, "you must learn how to feed it. First of all, mind this: two parts water and one milk."

"Yes," said John, tapping his forehead. "But it seems more reasonable two parts milk and one water. Then he needn't take in such a terrible lot—but I reckon it prolongs enjiment."

"You must not think, you must obey," said Joan. "You'd derange the baby with two of milk. Mind this: one part milk, and the bottle must be scalded out twice a day."

"Why scalded?"

"To keep the bottle sweet. And if the indian-rubber tube happen to choke, you must blow through it and clean it with a straw."

"Yes; but how'm I to know if it's choked?"

"You must look at the bottle when Frederick Augustus is sucking, and you'll see by the commotion within. If the liquid be still—it's choked. Then he must be fed four times in the night with a spoon. You're such a gashly hard sleeper, John!"

"I fear I be; but he'll make me wake up, I reckon—he roars like a bull o' Bashan."

"And if he has stomach-ache you'll remember to give him dill-water."

"But how'm I to know if he's got stomach-ache?"

"By the way he draws up his little knees and feet."

"Yes, I'll mind that. When he draws up his little knees and feet I'll give him dill-water."

"And if he's fractious, you'll sing to him; but none of your Rory-Tory tunes."

"No—I'll try not."

"Sing something soothing—a hymn or a lullabye,

> 'My baby clings as close to me
> As doth the bark unto the tree.'"

"I'll try what I can," said John dubiously.

"And if he is after teeth, you rub his gums."

"Yes, I'll rub his gums. But how'm I to know he is after teeth?"

"By his dribbling, of course."

"By his dribbling? I understand."

"Rub with your little finger dipped in the mixture, which is saffron and alum and honey. Don't use your other fingers, John: they are like horn, and you'd take the skin off his blessed gums."

"Yes, I'll mind," said John, and he tapped his forehead. "There's two parts water and one milk. There's scalding out the bottle. There's cleaning the tube. There's dill-water when he draws up his knees and feet. There's no Rory-Tory tunes, and feeding him four times in the night with a spoon. And there's rubbing his gums with the mixture. That's just seven things, like the seven days in the week, and the seven stars in the firmament. I'll mind 'em all. These be, I reckon, the seven great maxims and golden laws o' nussin'. Give my love to Martha, and I hope she'll relish the ham and the metheglin, and the swellin' 'll go down. Mind, old woman, you be back by Thursday, which is our fiftieth anniversary and jubilee."

IV

Joan had been gone somewhat over half-an-hour, and John had the baby out of the cradle, and was blowing through the tube, and converting the milk in the bottle into a foam of bubbles great and small, so as to assure himself that the passage was free, when a rush of wind swept past the house so suddenly that John dropped the bottle, and it would have been broken had it fallen on the floor and not into the cradle. The first rush was succeeded by stillness for a minute, and then the wind came down with a roar that was deafening, and with a violence that filled the room with smoke and flame from the hearth and chimney.

"My crikums!" exclaimed the old man. "Whatever will Joan do?"

He took the feeding-bottle out of the crib, replaced the infant, and went to the door.

A change had come over the sky. The moor rose as a wall to the east; and above it dense masses of vapour curled like waves over a reef. The sky in that quarter was black as ink, solid as lead. A single plover, the underwings white against the gloomy cloud, was flying west as though life depended on its speed. Frightened sheep had taken refuge under the walls on the lee side, round the little farm, and cowered there motionless, forgetting even to eat. Then the snow began to fall, in large fleeces at first, sailing before the wind with a certain leisureliness. Next they drove in smaller flakes, and in white parallel lines. Then all at once the whole atmosphere was converted into a boil of white particles, spinning, tossing in every possible direction, and nothing was visible beyond a couple of yards from the door, not even the shed opposite.

The babe began to scream. John was constrained to leave the door, and run back to it.

"Whatever is to be done?" he asked, as his heart quivered with fear. "There's my dear old woman on the moor, and here's this blessed baby in the house. I can't go after her. I can't leave him. I am drawn this way, I am pulled that. I wish to Heaven Whistle-Jack had remained."

He dipped his little finger in the mixture of alum, saffron, and honey, and rubbed the babe's gums with it, whilst his eyes were on the window, and watched the swirl of snow-dust through it.

"However will my Joan find her way?" he groaned.

The window-panes became plastered, and by degrees, the light obscured, it was as though whitewash were being laid over the glass, coat on coat.

"What is it now?" asked the old man, as the child went into a paroxysm of screams. "Is it stomick? Ah—them little legs is drawed up. Do be still whilst I go after the dill-water. Lor'! how selfish these babies be; they don't think of nothing but themselves, and there's my Joan out on the moor and I don't know whereabout she be and what she's doing."

The snow was heaping itself on the threshold, it was piling on the window-ledges; it was settling down behind hedges, over which it blew like sea-foam. It massed itself on thorn-bushes, then fell off in white avalanches. It accumulated on roofs till its weight forced it to slide down and thud upon the soil, and make room for fresh accumulations. It beat into John's face, and blinded him when he opened the door, and fell in over the threshold and bespattered the floor. The wind drove so hard into his mouth that he turned gasping, as though he had been under water.

"Whatever has become of Joan?" he exclaimed, with a gulp and sob. "I cannot leave her on the moors in this storm. She'll never make her way to the Eveas' in the teeth of the wind and the drive of the snow. I'll get my hat and stick and go seek her."

Then the babe began to cry.

"What is it now—gums or gripe? or is it bottle you want? I cannot leave you alone in the cottage, and I cannot let Joan lose herself on the moor? Whatever shall I do? I'm torn in shreds like a ragged robin. Come now, I'll sing y' to sleep, and then I can go out and seek Joan high and low."

The old man took the child in his arms, and seating himself on a chair, proceeded to swing himself vigorously, bawling in a cracked voice—

> "Three jolly boys are we,
> Ri-too-ral-loo. Ri-too-ral-lido."

The child continued crying.

"O crikums!" exclaimed John, "my Joan said I wasn't to sing no Rory-Tory tunes, but only psalms and spirituous songs.

Dratted if I can remember any now. Let's have a look if his knees and toes be drawed up. If so, it's stomick. Let's look at his little chin. If that's running over, it's teeth he's after. Lor' ! I wish I'd got that whistle I paid a penny for. Joan may say what she likes, but in such a howling wind the whistle would be most suitable, and nothing else could be heard as would send Frederick Augustus to sleep. But Joan put the whistle in her pocket and took it away. O dear ! O dear ! I wish I knowed two things : one where my Joan is, and t'other, how to pacify the baby."

After having swung his body to and fro like a pendulum for a quarter of an hour, without results adequate to the muscular effort, John put the child into the cradle, and applying his foot to the rocker, made the crib roll like the packet between Dover and Calais, for a second quarter of an hour. All the while his mind was in a tumult of concern for his wife, and in perplexity as to what was to be done for her. The child seemed to share in his distress. It would not be comforted.

"I believe it's just this," said the old man, looking distractedly at the crying babe. "Frederick Augustus is stuffed in his head, and can't breathe thro' his nose; that troubles him. I'll rub his nose up and down wi' a warm tallow candle, and 'twill ease him wonderful. And if it's on the chest, then there's somewhere the fellow of the sheet of brown paper as wrapped up the ham. I'll just drip mutton fat over it, and cut a couple of holes for the baby's arms, and wrap it round his back and chest. There ain't the equal to tallow and brown paper for a plaster. It beats embrocation. Lawk!" exclaimed John in sudden terror, "I wonder whether I gave the creetur saffron and alum instead o' dill-water. I'm that muddled in my head I can't think what I'm about. But if I did, then for certain there'll be terrible trouble in his insides, but the wind be that roaring about the roof and whistling at the door, and screaming in at the chimly-tops, I can't hear if I listen. I do wish it 'ud calm down about. I can't hear nothing distinct as to what's going on in his insides. O dear! what will Joan say if I have? I must look at his poor little legs again and see if they be drawed up. If they be, then for sure he's swallowed the alum, and I've rubbed his gums wi' dill-water."

However, to John's relief, the child fell asleep. Then the old man leaned his elbow on his knee, and fell into dream, looking down on the cradle. That was the cradle in which he had lain as a child. There he had sobbed and laughed in his infantile sorrows and joys. In that cradle his Martha had lain—the child that had made him and Joan to be parents "simultaneous," as the headstone stated. Now the third generation occupied it.

"O crikums!" groaned the man, raising his head at a fresh burst of wind that raved over and around the house. "Whatever can have become of my old woman? She can never have reached beyond the Cleave. And if the snow came on when she was there——" He got up and walked to and fro in the room, and a choke came in his voice. The babe in the cradle sobbed in sleep, as in sympathy. "We was so lovely and pleasant in our lives—and if aught happens to she—and in death we was to be divided—it 'ud spoil the whole cooriousness of our story. There's the baby at it again."

V

The night set in early without any cessation of storm. Throughout the hours of darkness the wind blew and the snow fell.

John had milked the cow and had given her hay. He had brought in turf and sticks for the hearth. He had listened in the hopes of hearing his wife's voice, and in imagination had believed momentarily that it was borne to him on the wind. He went out in the night as far as he dared go, but was compelled to return lest he should lose his direction and be unable to find his way back. Not a wink of sleep did John have that night. He did not attempt to undress and go to bed. He sat by the fire or wandered restlessly about the house. He asked himself a thousand times whether it was possible that his wife could have battled her way through to the Eveas' cottage, and, though he hoped against hope, he was obliged to allow that this was hardly possible. Then where was she? There was no habitation on the moors between his little farm and that of the Eveas. There was not a cattle-shed, not a hedge, not a tree—no shelter of any sort save that afforded by granite tors.

If Joan had seen the storm coming on when she reached the top of the range, why had she not retraced her steps? What could have induced her to push on when that wall of blackness stood up before her eyes. "I know," said John: "it was that darned fortnight's washing. She'd walk into a cannon's mouth, into the very jaws of hell, rather than let things go dirty a third week."

If Joan had gone on, had she stumbled in the snow—sunk in? and did she now lie under it? Tears trickled down the old man's cheeks. He drew his stool over to the headstone and passed his finger along each line of the inscription. What each letter signified he did not know, but he was well acquainted with what each group of symbols signified.

The day dawned. John had hoped that with light cessation of storm would have come. But there was none. He trusted that at noon the wind would abate and the fall of snow cease. There was no sensible abatement. Surely there would be calm and clear weather at sunset. That hope also proved vain. In dismay he saw how that the snow was accumulating to a considerable height. The night closed in—a night in all particulars like that which preceded it. John was as little inclined for bed as the night before.

The child was restless. John went to it.

"Joan said I was to feed him four times in the night; but how can one keep count when thus wurreted wi' maddening thoughts and dreadful fears? I reckon it's more like a hundred and forty-four times I've spoon-fed him. Then there's the bottle comes intermediate. Coming, coming, my 'ansome!"

And John ran to the cradle.

When the child lay still in sleep John's terrors were increased. He thought it was in a fit. He feared it was dying, and he roused it that he might satisfy himself that his doubt and alarm were vain.

"My goodness! O crikums!" exclaimed the old fellow. "I seem to be never endin' fillin' the bottle and making spoon-food. I do believe that Frederick Augustus has had as much as would fill the boiler. I'll just weigh the one against the other; and there's a bushel o' potatoes, bacon, and turnips in the boiler."

He removed the iron cauldron from the

crook with one hand, and raised the child from the cradle with the other, and gave a sigh of relief.

"Frederick Augustus is a tiny bit the lighter of the two," he said. "I shouldn't ha' thought it."

During the forenoon of Wednesday, the 11th, the violence of the wind abated, and for a while the snow ceased. The sky was overcast—it seemed compacted of grey wool. John Noble, standing at his door, looked east, and saw the moor white as a sheet half-way up the heavens. Every bush was covered, every rock buried, saving only at the edge of the crest, where the crags were too precipitous for snow to lodge upon them. Where could Joan be? What had befallen her? With maddening iteration the same thoughts and queries rose in his mind. Oh that some one would come to him from the nearest farm who for a while would take charge of the child whilst he went in search of his wife!

"If I could get rid o' that creetur in there," said John, pointing with his thumb over his shoulder at the cradle, "I'd walk till I found her or dropped. I daren't take the baby out in this bitter cold and rough weather, choked in the head as he be in spite of all the tallering I gave his nose. Yaw!" He turned his head towards the sleeping child. "You may call yourself Frederick Augustus, but I say you're a spotted toad, and a nuisance. If you weren't my own grandchild I'd leave you, and go forth and look for Joan."

He went to the crib, took the babe out, and danced it on his knee, singing in dolorous tones—

"There were three drunken maidens
Came from the Isle of Wight.
They drank from Monday morning,
They drank till Saturday night."

Then he stopped, for the "tick-tack, tick-tack" of the clock had suddenly ceased.

What was the signification of the clock stopping?

It had not intermitted its ticking since he and Joan had occupied that house.

He went to the clock-case with a dread of ill-omen on his heart, and there found that the clock had stopped because the weight had run down—it had run down because not wound up as usual by Joan on Monday evening. Joan's mind followed his wife on the way she had taken on the afternoon she left him. She had gone due east, with Hare Tor before her, and had bent to the left to avoid the "Old Men's Washings," a gully where, in ancient times, tinners had streamed for metal. She would, after a while, have reached the "leat," a stream of water conveyed for many miles along the hill-sides to supply a distant mine. An upright granite block indicated the spot where slabs had been cast across the stream to serve as a bridge for men and cattle. Joan assuredly had gone further than that. Had she crossed the neck between Hare Tor and Ger Tor? If so, then she would strike over open down unencumbered with rocks till she reached the Cleave, down which roared and foamed the river Tavy. There it was that most of the danger lay. The descent was precipitous, among rocks tossed in confusion from the heights, their interstices at all time concealed by heather and whortleberry bushes. Supposing she had reached the bottom of the ravine she would have to cross the river on the stepping-stones. Could she have done that before the storm came on? Could she have discovered the stepping-stones in the blinding snow? If she found them, could she have crossed the raging torrent on them without slipping and being swept away? And even supposing she had reached the further bank, then her difficulties would not have been at an end, her peril would have become the greater, for beyond was open moor, with hardly a landmark, only to be traversed by such as were intimately acquainted with the way, and by them only in clear daylight, and when the direction was unmistakable. If she had gone from her course there, God help her! even her body might never be found in that vast, trackless desert, where even animal, bird, and insect life fails. With these thoughts John tortured himself all the afternoon, and could find no rest.

All at once the door of the house opened, and in blew a cloud of snow-dust. The storm had arisen again, and this time, after a lull of twelve hours, with redoubled fury. The house reeled under the weight of the blast that blew the snow from the thatch like a cloud of steam. On the former days flakes had fallen, sometimes large, at others small. Now an impalpable powder of snow, minute as finest wheat-flour, was impelled before a wind that had the force and fury of a torrent.

"It's the end o' the world comin'," said John, "and but for Frederick Augustus, who ain't yet seen a menagerie, I'd be glad if it were so, for then Joan and me 'ud not run risk o' being divided."

That was the night of the great blizzard in the West of England, a night never to be forgotten by such as passed through it; a night that saw forests of oaks laid low, torn up by the roots on which they had stood for three hundred years, pines twisted and their heads wrenched off, houses buried to their chimney-tops, roofs blown away, roads obliterated. That was the night to which the two previous nights had been but a preparation and a prelude.

VI

On the morning of Thursday the 12th the wind subsided as suddenly as it had risen; and when the sun rose it was in a cloudless sky. Not a breath of wind stirred, and the air was warm as on a summer day, yet the aspect of the country was polar.

The condition of the snow had been completely changed by the final gale. On Tuesday and on Wednesday the entire surface of the land had been covered with an all-enveloping white mantle, but the subsequent hurricane had swept the hills as with a besom, and had swept the snow into every valley, hollow, and corner. Roads were choked level with the hedgerows, the rocks that had fronted the storm had inclined planes of snow from behind to their summits. Houses that lay athwart the blast were in like manner buried to their roof-tops on the lee side, whereas every particle of snow was brushed from before and from behind such houses as stood parallel with the path of the wind. The face of the country was mottled. Here it was clear, there covered with drifts—and such drifts! the snow, moreover, was so soft that to traverse it was impossible. Men sank in it as in egg-flummery. It had to be cut through, it could not be walked over. Progress from place to place was accomplished solely by circumventing the vast accumulations.

John was standing in his doorway as the sun rose over the serrated ridge, and his eyes were dazzled at the brilliance with which its rays illumined the snow-fields around. Then he heard voices, and in another moment Whistle-Jack and three farm labourers from the nearest settlement stood before him; he knew them all: they were Philip Lang, Matthew Crossman, and Tom Down.

"I have come," said Narracot; "I thought it my duty, as I sent her off wi' the news in that letter. I was terrible anxious all through the storm, but till to-day I couldn't get out to you. Is Joan returned?"

"Joan returned? No!"

"And she has never got to the Eveas'. I've seed a man as was caught by the storm when coming over the moor on the road, and he stayed at Evea's, Monday and Tuesday night. He managed somehow to get along Wednesday, but was nigh spent by doing it."

"And Joan?"—the old man trembled.

"She had not arrived. I hoped she'd managed to get back to you."

"My wife! my wife!" cried the old man. Then, running into the cottage, he wrapped the baby in a blanket, knotted the blanket and looped it over his neck, and brought the child out. "Come, Frederick Augustus!" said he, "we must go and look for your grandmother. God cannot have forsaken her! God cannot have forgotten me!" The child was frightened at the sight of so many strange faces, and sobbed incessantly. But the old man disregarded its terrors, and insisted on going forth over the moor in quest of his lost Joan, and in carrying the child whilst doing so.

The party ascended the slope, picking its way slowly along, winding in and out among the sheets of treacherous snow that covered old mine-pits or concealed the chasms between blocks of granite. John knew every inch of the way, disguised, transformed though it was. He saw the granite post, standing, like Lot's wife, a pillar, not indeed of salt, but of snow, that indicated the passage of the "leat." The watercourse was arched over with snow, the stream was invisible, and but for the upright stone the party might have missed the bridge and floundered into the water.

"Mind where you go!" said John. "That great rock there—we call it the Frog; but it doesn't look like a frog now, so buried is it in snow. That must be kept to the left. There's a quaking bog nigh on it to be avoided. You can't see the bog for the snow that lies over it."

"Hark!" said one of the men, "what bird is that?"

They heard a strange note.

"Is it a crane?"

"We ain't here looking for birds, or listening to their voices," said John testily. "We are hunting for my old Joan. The Lord be merciful to her and to me! She's not at the Eveas', she's not come home. Wherever can she be?"

"Hark! I hear that bird again," said Whistle-Jack.

"It isn't a crane, I reckon it's a curlew."

The party pressed on. One man offered to carry the child, but John refused.

"I'm given the charge of Frederick Augustus," said he. "If we come on my old woman, she won't be pleased to see any one carry him but me, to whom the child was confided."

After they had left the Frog Rock a rifle-shot off on their left, they came on a dip in the moor where were rushes that had caught the drifting snow. The soil was spongy, the snow light as sea-foam, and advance was slow and infinitely laborious. Then suddenly they emerged on land swept clean of snow, and here they pushed forward lustily.

In half-an-hour the crest of the moorland and its serrated crag was passed, and the course lay due east over a slightly undulating surface almost wholly devoid of stones, and where no snow lay. Then suddenly they came out on the "Cleave," a gorge three hundred feet deep, fringed with rocks, and almost as precipitous as the walls of a house. At the bottom was wont to rush a brawling river, and its roar was usually audible from the Cleave edge. But on this day all was silent. The chasm was choked with a vast accumulation of snow as far up as the eye could reach, the snow lay smooth as a sheet, and beyond it rose the brown moor. The blizzard had brushed the uplands and had flung its covering into the ravine, filling it to the height of nearly three hundred feet. John stood up as one stupefied. He put his hands to his head, his knees shook under him.

"The Lord has spread His sheet over her——" he said.

That Joan could have crossed the ravine before the snowstorm came on was not possible. In it she must have perished, and over her the Lord had heaped His snow!

Silent, with bowed head, and the briny tears running down his cheeks, John walked homeward. The child slept the greater part of the way. When it awoke, then Whistle-Jack, without a word, relieved him of the burden, and carried the babe in his arms the rest of the way. Old John made no protest, his head was stunned.

Presently Whistle-Jack said, "Hush! There's that coorious note again. I wonder what bird it can be."

"Aye, and we hears it in much the same place. Whatever bird it be, her's piping somewhere about the Frog Rock."

The old man, stumbling on without eyes for where he was going, ears for aught said, stepped unawares into a drift and sank to his waist in snow. He made no effort to extricate himself, and it took those who were of the search-party some time before they could draw him forth. He was exhausted with his walk, with carrying the child, with the difficulties of the way, but most of all through the extinction in his heart of the hope that had heretofore stimulated his efforts.

"I can't go on," said he. "Leave me here."

His knees shook and gave way under him.

"Nonsense, man; come along. You have but a couple of miles to go, and you are home."

"I've no home more—Joan bean't there."

"Make an attempt," said one man. "Here, take my stick, or, if you like, lean on me."

John staggered forwards, then sank on the ground.

"It's no good trying," said he. "I'm done for. The Lord has buried her, so leave Him to do the same wi' me."

"There's that queer bird singing again," said another man.

"It's the death-piper," said John. "I reckon he cried seven times over my Joan before she fell asleep in the snow, and her soul went flying off in the storm. It's come and is calling me."

"Nonsense, man."

"I hope it be," said John, sinking together in a condition of mental and bodily collapse. "We was lovely and pleasant in our lives, and it's right as in death we should not be divided."

Whistle-Jack put his hands under the arms of the old man and endeavoured to raise him, but it seemed as though the power to sustain himself on his feet had gone from him.

"Tom Down, give him a drop o' brandy. He's failing."

"Tom Down is gone," answered another

man. "He's so tremendious coorious about that there bird as be whistling at the Frog Rock, he's gone to see what it be."

"And has carried off the brandy. Run after him."

Then Whistle-Jack put the sleeping child in the old man's lap.

"Look here, John," said he, "you must not give up because you've lost your old woman. There's the young one to be cared for."

John did not raise his head; he slightly shook it.

"There's your daughter you must consider."

"Her's got her husband, and I've lost my old wife. I reckon if the Lord's took her He'll be so good as to kindly take me. Us can never get on in this world or the next wi'out each other." He settled himself deeper into the snow. "Whatever 'll Joan do when her comes to glory and finds I'm not there? It's no good you talking; where she is there I must be. Us never was parted, and next Thursday——"

"It is Thursday to-day, John."

"Well, to-day us be fifty years married. I hope the Lord 'll remember that, and take me at once."

"We shall have to carry him," said Jack.

"She'll be just as lost in glory wi'out me as I be here on earth wi'out her," muttered the old man. He shook his head. He folded his hands over the baby in the blanket. "She'll be wandering about among saints and angels, and axing where the dickens be her old John. I know she will. She'll be in a regular wurrit till I be there."

"Let us help you along," said Whistle-Jack. "Here, Mat Crossman, lend an arm and lift him."

"I want nought but to be left alone," said the old man. "You may take the baby and carry him to the Eveas', to whom it belongs. I can't mind it no longer. I'm going to my Joan."

"Where is Philip Lang?" asked Jack.

"He's gone after Down to get the brandy for the old chap."

"I wants no brandy," said John Noble; "I shall drink o' the Water o' Life along wi' my Joan shortly. All I axes is to be let alone."

What was to be done with the old fellow? Jack and Matthew looked at each other in perplexity. They might insist on carrying him the two miles that intervened, but it was clear he would resist. A stolid, obstinate fit had come upon him. His reason no longer acted. He had lost all desire for life. Though he would not actively take measures to destroy himself, he would, if left, remain where he was, lay his old grey head in the snow, fold his hands under it, and compose himself for the long sleep of death, in perfect satisfaction that he was about to rejoin the dear partner of his life.

The two men were aware that the kindest thing they could do to John was to leave him where he was, to pass away out of an existence in which was nothing that could please him; yet they could not in conscience suffer him thus to die; they must use violence, if need be, to prolong the old man's remnant of life.

"Now look here, John," said Mat Crossman. "This ain't manly to give up as you be doin'. Try to pluck yourself together, hold up your head and straighten your legs, and come along with us. We won't leave you alone in your cottage; and you're a young man yet and may look out for another missus. I knowed old Jonathan Ball as went a-courting when he was past seventy-eight; he pulled on his Sunday coat and brushed up his hair, and put a sparkle in his eye—and was quite a boy again."

The inducement failed to rouse old John.

"There's Jesse Venner," pursued Mat, "wi' cheeks as red as bloom and a languishing eye. She's a fine strapping young woman—put a yaller rose in your buttonhole and go a-courting o' her. No! Well, then, there's Lizzy Penrose. Her's got money, they say—and that will make you rare comfortable in your old days."

"Get away from me," said John angrily. "I don't want to hear none o' your wicked words. I want to go to my Joan. Will y' leave me now in peace? I wants to compoge my mind for meeting of her."

"Have done wi' your drashy talk!" said Whistle-Jack, turning with mock-indignation on Matthew Crossman. "Don't y' know that John Noble will never marry again? What John wants ain't languishing eyes and rosy cheeks; I know what he wants. Get up, John, and come wi' me. I'll do you a rasher o' bacon and ingeons, John!—ingeons as smell the whole house, and is burnt a lovely brown like tobacker; and I'll brew you some cider posset, biling hot, with sugar and nutmeg, and just a touch o' ginger. I'll make y' sleep like a baby. Give me your hand and get up and come along."

But the prospect of burnt onions and cider posset had no charms for the old man.

Then suddenly there rang in their ears, shrill and loud, the same mysterious note they had heard before. Mat and Jack looked round in the direction of the Frog Rock, and uttered an exclamation.

"John!" cried Whistle-Jack, "man, stand up and see the loving-kindness o' Heaven."

The old man obeyed, staggering laboriously to his feet, with the baby slung in its blanket round his neck.

"John!"

Then suddenly, with a cry, "Joan!"

The old woman stood before him as hearty as when she left his door.

"John, old man!"

"Joan, old woman!"

"John! I've been buried three days."

"Joan! and I've been nussin' three days."

"John, when the storm came on I took shelter under the Frog, and the snow came on and buried me there. But I had the ham and the metheglin, and I did famously. And there was a hole in the rock that wasn't stopped up wi' snow—so I knocked out the bottom o' the bottle, and I stuck the whistle you bought o' Jack in the mouth, and it made a tremenjous row it did—like a trumpet, and I stuck that through the hole, and every now and then I blew. I thought I might call attention."

"Shall we carry you home, John?" asked Philip Lang.

"Lord! Carry me! I'll lean on Joan, and Joan on me, and we'll walk along right enough. We was lovely and pleasant in our lives—— Go on, you fellows, and we'll come along right enough in the rear, and carry the baby between us."

"Oh, John," said the old woman, "I've been that worreted under the snow, thinking of the fortnight's washing."

* * * * *

When the party had reached the cottage, thin rashers of ham, with onions, were quickly fried, two bottles of metheglin were produced; likewise a posset of cider was brewed, and the whole party sat down to be merry and glad over the deliverance of Joan, the recovery of John, the well-being of Frederick Augustus, and the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the marriage of the old couple.

"And now," said Whistle-Jack, "maybe

you'll hear my song as I compoged for this very occasion."

He cleared his throat, and half said, half sang—

"'Tis fifty years, my old wife Joan,
'Tis fifty years to-day,
Since we was wed—an age agone,
Swift slips the time away.
The bells did ring, the thrushes sing,
Upon our wedding-day.

"You was so peart and purty, Joan,
As wild rose you was fair,
The sun in richer glory shone
When shining in your hair.
The sky was bright, ablaze with light,
And balmy breathed the air."

"You was so spruce, you was, man John,
No lad around so neat.
You almost danced as you went on,
So tripping was your feet.
Your face it shone just like the sun,
Your song was blithe and sweet."

"You wore a gown as white as snow,
Wi' sprigs of flowers, I mind.
A silken sash, a cherry bow
Was tied your waist behind.
A ribbon rare it bound your hair
And fluttered in the wind."

"You wore a coat o' bottle-green
And buttons burnish'd brass,
Your waistcoat was of velveteen,
Your boots they shone as glass.
With such a beau all maids, I trow,
Thought me a lucky lass."

"We now be grown so old and weak,
Our time is short below,
And when it please the Lord to speak,
Prepared are we to go,
All hand in hand, to the bless'd land
Where days no darkness know.

"And when we stand before the throne
O' Him above that be,
We'll say—'Here come old John and Joan,
No truer hearts than we.
'Tweren't heaven alone without my Joan,
We *must* together be.'"

"Yes," said the old man, "I reckon that's all right enough, but, Joan—we'll have it on the monument."

"What, John?"

"Well, ours be for certain a most coorious story. You was buried in the snow three days, and I nussin' a baby three days—and both of us survived the operation—the same day—simultaneous."

DANIEL JACOBS

An old man with white hair, an intelligent face, finely cut features, and lustrous dark eyes; dressed in discarded garments of other folk that fitted him in no way, a cripple, with distorted leg, and a green baize bag under his arm.

Coat and trousers are like Joseph's garment, of divers colours; not that they were so originally, but have so become by spillings of ale, by the stain of peat water, by patching of incongruous stuff, by mendings with unsuitable thread.

Daniel Jacobs is a homeless man. He possesses not a hearth at which he can kindle his fire, nor a handful of thatch to cover his white head. He is wifeless, childless, utterly, hopelessly alone in this rough world. Is—do I say? Was—he has passed away. But as I write these words concerning him, the figure of the man with a wasted life and forlorn old age rises up so vividly before my mind's eye, that he seems to me to be still present, very real, and not a memory.

The face of Daniel Jacobs is not to be forgotten, with its aquiline nose, delicately moulded fine lips, and wondrous eyes.

Daniel's face, pleasant enough in repose, may then call up the wish that a little more soap and water had been applied, a little bit of razor addressed to the jaws and chin, a little combing to the hair, that charity would bestow on him a little more and warmer clothing, clothing that, at least, is cleaner. But when Daniel pulls forth his old violin, as shabby as himself, places it under his chin, and draws his bow across the strings, then every defect is forgotten in the study of his eyes.

A far-off look comes into them. You speak to him; he does not hear you. He is away in spirit in the music world, seeking out some old country dance tune, or some minor ballad air.

Presently Daniel's eye lightens, as though the sun has shone into it, a smile breaks out on the worn features of the white face, and he rapidly fiddles the tune that he has found. Then—it is of no use attempting to speak. He neither sees, nor hears, nor feels anything, he is wrapped up in his cloud of music, carried off in a whirlwind of harmonious sound—like Elijah transported heavenward in the chariot of fire.

Fine strung, sensitive to a touch, is the soul of Daniel—again I write of the man as though he were before me. I cannot otherwise, so strongly has his personality impressed me.

I met him first in a garden. A lady had asked him to come and meet me, and play me some of his old-world music. He came, and sat himself down under a syringa bush. As it happened, there were afternoon callers—several ladies and children, and when told that he was fiddling, they came into the garden to see and hear Daniel.

As it happened, a little dog jumped about plucking at the sash worn by a young girl, and she laughed aloud. At once a shiver passed through Daniel, a look of distress came into his face, and he attempted to creep away.

"Why are you going, Daniel?"

"Please—I know I'm an old man and ridiculous—I thought the ladies had had enough o' me."

He did not half believe it when assured that the laugh concerned the dog, and not himself.

There is a song that was composed about the time of the death of General Wolfe, 1759; it begins thus—

"Bold General Wolfe to his men did say,
Come, lads, and follow me without delay,
To yonder mountain that is so high;
Don't be downhearted, but gain the victory.

"There stand the French on the summit high,
While we poor lads in the valley lie;
I see them falling, as motes in the sun,
Through smoke and fire, all from the British gun."

It concludes with—

"When to Old England you do return,
Tell all my friends I am dead and gone;
And bid my mother, so kind and dear,
No tears to shed for me, a hero's grave awaits me here."

Both rhyme and metre are faulty, but there is a certain pathos in the words, and a great deal in the very charming, tender air that accompanies them.

I had often heard this song of "Bold General Wolfe," and had heard many variants and some grievous corruptions of the melody. I asked Daniel if he knew "Bold General Wolfe."

He did not answer in words. The far-off look came into his eyes, he remained with bow poised in air waiting, recalling. I hummed to him the opening strain. He heard me not, he had gone off in memory to an old tavern where men sat about the worm-eaten table wet with ale slops, and with little piles of tobacco-ash heaped up, and he paused listening to these old comrades singing in the far-away past. Then the sun came into Daniel's countenance, he drew his bow across the strings, and played the tune till he reached the "Don't be downhearted," when a cloud came over his face, his eyes became dull, he faltered and broke down. He had forgotten.

Again he essayed "Bold General Wolfe," and again he failed. The old man was distressed; he would not be able to relish any meat, not drink his drop of ale, not sleep a wink of sleep till he had recovered "Don't be downhearted."

Presently a sigh of relief came from his bosom.

"I reckon," said he, "there's Tailor Vanstone can zing he. But he ain't a right tailor neither, for he don't sit cross-legged, for as he harn't got but one leg to cross. T'other's lost somehow."

"Come along," said I, "we'll go visit Mr. Vanstone."

So away we went together, the poor limping fiddler and myself, in quest of the one-legged tailor. We found him, and he was ready enough to supply the missing strain. Vanstone had a stentorian voice, and he bellowed as a bull—"Don't be downhearted! Don't be downhearted."

"A minute!" pleaded Daniel, as he set his fiddle under his chin and twanged the strings to get the key in which Vanstone was roaring.

Vanstone swelled his lungs and began again—

"Don't be downhearted! Don't be downhearted! Don't be downhearted!"

A smile on old Daniel's face, and with his bow he ran on, and sang, "But ga-a-a-a-ain the victory!"

Daniel Jacobs' life has been a wasted one. His is a wrecked career. He told me one day how this came about. When he was a boy he had made for himself a little fiddle, and had acquired some skill on it. It produced but a feeble noise, much like the twittering of the toys that amuse children, when a quill strikes a cord.

One day a gentleman heard him play, and was struck by his skill and ingenuity.

"Dan'l, would you like to become a musician?"

It was as though a sunbeam shot into his heart and filled it with glory. I can conceive the answer of the boy—not in words, but with a blaze of thankfulness out of his handsome full brown eyes.

"Well," said the gentleman, "I do not mind finding the money for your training. Run home, Daniel, and get your father's consent, and we will make a great man of you."

The boy ran, nay, bounded home. He did not feel the earth under his feet.

The father was a Methodist, of a severe school.

"Make a fiddler of you?" he exclaimed. "The Lord forbid that I should have a son turn out such a worthless scamp. Come along, you rascal, with me."

He caught the boy by the arm, dragged him to a saddler, and then and there apprenticed him to that man. The boy became ill with disappointment; he could not eat nor sleep. He cried over his work and did it badly. He was ashamed to go back to the gentleman and tell him that he had not been allowed to accept his generous offer.

"That wor a mistake," said Daniel; "I ought to ha' done it, but I wor part shy, part ashamed. I didn't know how to put it to the gentleman—'twas Squire Stoodly—that was like as if I threw his offer back in his face, and so I let it alone. And I worn't easy i' my mind about that, and I took on cruel about myself, for I didn't fancy the saddling trade, and I knowed I'd never get on in that. Well, your Honour, next winter were a green winter as made a fat churchyard. It took off my father wi' a brownkitties (bronchitis), and Squire Stoodly wi' an ulster (ulcer) in his stomick. My master he sed he niver could make nothing raysonable out o' me, but I bided on my time, and when that was up, he sed he couldn't afford to keep me on, as I weren't worth the thread and needles I broke! So—I've been ever since."

Ever since a wandering fiddler, homeless, almost friendless. Alas! the fiddle took him to the tavern, and there he was treated to ale for the sake of his fiddle, and was given by the taverner a shake-down in a corner of the stable or shed.

What little money he earned was through his needle. He travelled from farm to farm to mend broken harness, patch up torn saddles; his work was coarse, uncouth, but strong, and on the Moor, who cares much for the appearance of his horse gear?

Always with the old fiddle in its green case under his arm, he trudged about, and was given work where there was work to be done, and never was denied a meal. Perhaps he might have done better had he been able to settle down and open a little saddler's shop, but the violin interfered, that drew him to the public-house, where he expended his little earnings, and therefore he was never able to accumulate sufficient to take a shop and stock it.

One Sunday, the curate in charge of one of the chapels on the Moor met ragged David hobbling along, with the sweat-drops on his brow, for to walk was painful to him. Said the curate—

"Mr. Jacobs, do you ever go to a place of worship?"

Daniel halted, looked vacantly around at the brown moor with the grey rocks crowning the heights, drew his fiddle from the cover, and passing the bow across the strings, played "The Old Hundredth."

That was his sole answer.

He put back the fiddle, and hobbled on. But the look of his eyes said, "My work is in the farm, my entertainment is in the tavern, my worship—when my heart rises to God—is here."

Trouble came to Daniel Jacobs. One blustering night, when the snow fell in flakes, he had applied for work, and was told there was none, and he was not offered shelter or food. To proceed over the moors was impossible. He was spent with weariness, and in his crippled condition he could not get along in the snow.

So the old man sought out a barn, in which was straw, and there he lit his pipe, and began to tune his instrument.

Now the farmer suspected that Daniel had not gone far, so he went to look for him, before he shut up for the night, and found him smoking and fiddling among the straw.

This was too much for his endurance, and Daniel was summoned before the magistrates and sent to prison for a calendar month.

I saw the old man somewhat later—in the summer. I had invited him to come and see me, and bring me a budget of folk melodies I had set him to collect.

He appeared, ragged, forlorn, with his sweet, engaging smile, that, however, almost brought tears into the eyes of those who saw him.

"I beg your Honour's pardon if I have

not done what your Honour set me. There was a little circumstance was against my doing what I had undertaken—with the partic'lars o' which I needn't trouble your Honour; they wouldn't interest none but me" (that meant his having been in gaol). "I'm very sorry to have to disappoint you—but since then I've had the in-flow-in-sir (influenza)."

The summer was fine, promised to be unusually dry; so I encouraged the old man to employ himself through it in collecting airs for me, in addition to his usual work of going round the farms mending harness.

The summer passed, and I heard nothing of him. Then I thought to inquire after the fiddler at some of the farms to which he was wont to resort. At each I was told, "Yes, Dan'l, he's been here. Gettin' terrible frail and uncertain."

Where could he be?

No one was responsible for him. His home was nowhere. He was but a bird of passage everywhere. He had been here, been there, walking with more difficulty than usual, looking whiter in face than usual, complaining that "this here in-flow-in-sir had left him cruel weak." It was surmised that it had affected his mind. He never had been a good workman; now his work was done worse than ever, and he seemed to have no satisfaction in anything save playing his violin.

"And what has he been performing?"

"Nothin' particular, just a bit here and a bit there—but the poor old chap, he'd sit as one lost in a sort o' dream, and then take out his fiddle, and begin playing and singing—

'Don't be downhearted,
Don't be downhearted,
But ga-a-a-ain the victory.'"

"You do not think he has got into trouble again?"

"N-no. You see there's no depending on him. He don't seem to think o' nothing but his fiddle. If he'd been setting fire to anything, we'd have heard. But bless y' there's no more malice in the ou'd man than in a lamb or dove."

Not having been able to hear tidings of Daniel Jacobs at the farms, I inquired at the inns—not at temperance taverns, they were not likely to be frequented by the fiddler. What a strange thing it was—here was this poor, wrecked life, wrecked and poor through one fatal mistake, and that not his own. Had his father suffered him to accept the offer made him as a boy, Daniel might have been a prosperous as well as a happy man. Allowed to follow his natural bent, to develop the genius that was in him, to live in his proper artistic world, he would have been able to do more than maintain himself; he would in all likelihood have had a home, with wife and children, perhaps at this age even grandchildren, climbing on his knee and kissing the old man, as they played with his snowy locks.

It was infinitely sad to think that a father, well-intentioned, generally right-minded, should have marred his son's life by one act of wrong judgment. The life of this man was wreckage from end to end; he knew it, he traced it back to that fatal mistake, but never said a harsh word against the father who had spoiled his life. "You see, your Honour, he were a terrible strict man in his idees, and a taytotaller." So this was the result of principles carried out to exaggeration.

No doubt the old man felt that he himself was too full of fault to cast a stone against his father, even had not filial reverence held him back from so doing.

Now I was constrained to inquire at the public-houses for the lost son of the "taytotaller." I heard he had been seen, but no one knew where he was. No publican was responsible for him.

"Well, sir," said one landlord, "I was sorry for the old chap, but you see I really could not keep him for nothing. He wouldn't even play through a lively bit of a dance for the men, he went rambling about from one tune to another. He'd raythe suit his own fancy than ours, and so at last he went away—fiddling as he went."

"Fiddling as he went?"

"Yes, sir, and singing—

'Don't be downhearted,
Don't be downhearted,
But ga-a-a-ain the victory.'"

"When was that?"

"Only yesterday."

"And which way did he go?"

The publican indicated the direction.

It was clear to me that Daniel had intended to cross a portion of moorland to a farm that lay some miles to the north. The way was not easy—there intervened some rock-strewn slopes and several rather troublesome bogs.

I thought of following in the direction taken by him, and making inquiry at the farm. In all probability I would find him there.

A friend was with me. We agreed to walk thither together, and on the way to measure an avenue of upright stones that had not hitherto been planned. We had a good walk, the wind was cold, and there was no sun; the sky overcast, the moor plum colour from the shadows of the burdened clouds. After we had gone some distance my friend said, "I pity your old cripple over such a ragged moor as this. Could he have done it?"

"That we shall soon learn. Yonder is the farm."

We reached the settlement,—a house surrounded by fields and "new-takes."

Daniel Jacobs had not been there.

The innkeeper must have been mistaken as to his purpose.

We started to return, and had walked nearly half-way back, when we came on an old ruined cottage in a coombe; it had not been tenanted within the memory of man. No trees sheltered it, but the rotten stumps of some remained. Not a particle of roof was in position.

My friend cast himself down outside, where the wall sheltered him from the cold blast. "I vote for grub," said he, and he unslung his bottle of cold tea, and began to unbuckle the bag that contained sandwiches and cake, and hard-boiled eggs. Nothing loth, I cast myself beside him, and soon conversation ceased, as both were engaged in eating.

Whilst we took our lunch, at intervals a strange and inexplicable sound reached our ears. Both noticed it, but neither spoke about it for some time. Presently, when it had been repeated for half-a-dozen times, my friend said, "Old chap, what the dickens is that?"

I shrugged my shoulders.

The sound was peculiar, musical, as of a harp twanged, and then came an interval of silence, then the twang again long drawn.

"Where does it come from?" asked my friend.

"I'll go see—it is somewhat uncanny," said I, jumping up, leaving my flask and sandwiches, and entering the ruin by the broken-down doorway. Then I started.

Near the long-disused hearth and the granite chimney-piece, supported against the jamb, was Daniel Jacobs, dead, in a sitting posture, and beside him, fallen from his hand—the violin.

I stood silent, amazed, doubtful whether the old man really was dead—then I heard the plaintive sound again. A heather bush grew among the fallen stones beside the fiddle, and the wind, driving in in gusts through the broken door, carried the harsh branches with a sweep across the exposed strings; it drew forth a vibration—ceased, then swept like mystic fingers over the strings again, and again brought out that weird, mournful note. I looked again at the old man. There was no longer the old far-off look in the eyes, but a look further still. He was looking, not into the tone-world here, but into the world of harmony beyond.

SNAILY HOUSE

I

The day was drawing in—a nasty day, with lumbering clouds rolling up from the north-west bursting with ice-cold showers.

The spot, moreover, was about as nasty an one as could have been found for exposure on such a day, and for encountering the driving rain, chill as thawed hailstones, and nearly as hard as hailstones unthawed.

This spot was the road that crosses Dartmoor from Moreton Hampstead to Tavistock. The whole of this wide, howling wilderness is traversed by one road only, with two branches, forming the letter Y. One branch goes north-east to Moreton, the other south-east to Ashburton, from a point above Two Bridges—where, by the way, of bridges there is but one—situated about half-way through Dartmoor.

The spot on which we are looking at this moment is half-way up the left-hand branch, precisely where that road reaches its highest elevation, fifteen hundred feet above the sea level, and where is planted the highest wayside inn in England.

All round, far as the eye could reach, only brown moor rising into ridges, falling away into deep valleys, the shoulders scarred as though they had been lashed by the knout of the Russian, and healed over in welts—the traces of ancient tin-streamers' works.

The wind came on cutting as a ploughshare from the cold staring eye of the wind, to the north-west, over which hung an ink-black frown heavy with threat. It moaned in the heather, it piped in the rushes, it sobbed in the bracken, and it screamed as in the agony and rage combined of a tortured idiot, through the loose stone walls that were thrown up to mark tin-bounds, walls of stone lace-work, without mortar, and riddled with interstices.

If the day was one of the worst conceivable, and the spot one of the most exposed, those struggling along the road were the least suited to encounter the inclemency of the weather and place; they were two girls, so strikingly alike, and so exactly the same in dress, as in feature and height, that none for a minute could doubt that they were twin sisters.

"Janie," said the one, "I reckon there be anither o' them Northern Nannies a-coming on us."

"Joan, I fear it too," answered the other. "They're terrifying things, they be."

A Northern Nannie is one of those explosions of ice-cold rain in a driving blast that was being threatened by the lowering sky.

"Here's a public-house, Janie," said the second. "What do'y say, shall us turn in till the Nannie be a-passed over?"

"No, Janie, I reckon not. It don't seem fitty for two young maidens to go into an ale-house, and there be miners there for sure."

"Whativer shall us do then, Joanie? 'Tis cruel cold, and nothing will niver keep the rain out o' we. It will blow right into our bones."

"There's a sort o' a shay at the door."

"Yes, but what's the good o' a shay to we?"

"Us can get into 'n out o' the rain."

"No, surely!"

"Yes, why not? There is no one in it."

The two girls came to the carriage, and

peeped through the glass windows, just as the rain began to fall like a volley from a regiment.

The conveyance was of a very wonderful description. It was painted yellow, it had glass in front, and a leather apron. It would accommodate two persons only, like a modern hansom. It was slung on immense C springs. This conveyance dated from the days of the Regency, when the Prince came to Dartmoor to visit Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt at Tor Royal. On the death of Sir Thomas, this had been sold along with other effects, and had passed into the possession of a little publican at Crockern Tor, named Leaman. The publican was dead, and his son Joe reigned in his stead at "The Fox Brush," on the roadside.

On this day laden with Northern Nannies, Joe Leaman had driven a couple of gentlemen to Moreton Hampstead, who had come to the moor on a scheme for the extraction of naphtha from the peat. Now he was on his return to "The Fox Brush," and had turned into "The Warren Inn" to have a drop of something comforting and strengthening against the sweep of the gale and its icy splash, before proceeding on his way. The patient horse remained outside harnessed to the conveyance, with head down, its hair blown into rough heaps and brakes. A moorland brute little heeds wind and rain, so long as it can turn its tail to both. This creature may perhaps have felt a hardship in having to face the blast and the stroke of the rain, but it bore all with stolid endurance.

"There be no one in the carriage," said Joan. "I reckon us could do worse than hop in."

"But whativer should us say — if found ?"

"Say," repeated Joan, "that us were terrified at the rain, and us wanted to keep dry—and two modest, decent maidens don't go into public-houses."

The rain swept almost horizontally, it was more like the rush of a mill-sluice than of a rain-storm. The girls could find their way into the trap only by unbuttoning the apron, and creeping in under the windows. Joan led the way, Jane followed with hesitation.

"Shut the flap, fasten 'n do'y," said Joan. "Oh my, bain't this cosy like in here ?"

Cosy the little interior was, snugly cushioned, warm as though heated by a stove—so it seemed to the girls as they found shelter from the raging wind that swept from Labrador charged with bitterness and cold.

In two minutes a white cloud had formed on the glass panes of the vehicle, through which nothing could be seen save the trickling of drops down the outside of the glass.

"There's a fog come on—white as wool," said Jane.

"I reckon not," answered Joan. "See, with my finger I can scatter it." Then she drew a comical face on the pane through the cloud of condensed breath.

"I wonder how long us can bide here," mused Jane. "'Twill be ten times worse when us have to get out again."

"You be easy," answered the sister; "take comfort while you may; the driver won't come out of 'The Warren Inn' till the Northern Nannie be overpast, and then us can get out same time. When the weather suits he then it will suit we."

The girls had walked for several miles, had ascended steep hills, had been exposed to the wind, which had been in their faces the whole way; each was encumbered with a tolerably heavy bundle that contained a best gown and necessary articles. Both were somewhat exhausted with exercise and exposure to which they were unwont. Both now felt the satisfaction of rest in an equable temperature, and in a luxurious seat. The transition was so sudden, that it produced an unexpected effect on the sisters. At first they lapsed into silence, and in another moment into unconsciousness.

Both were roused with a start by the feeling that they were in motion, and as they gathered their senses together, became aware that the vehicle was in rapid progression down a hill.

The sisters looked each other in the face —then looked before them. Through the white film on the glass they could see something looming black and big. It was the driver. He had mounted the box unperceived by them, and had started on his way unconscious that his conveyance was occupied; for the vaporous coating of the panes that prevented the girls from seeing what was outside, prevented him from observing what was within.

What were they to do? They were frightened. They could not get out. They did not know how to open the carriage, and to emerge from under the apron in a crawling posture, whilst the conveyance was proceeding at a rapid pace downhill, was not to be thought of.

To open the window in front was the only thing that could be done, and in their nervousness and inexperience they did not know how to do this.

It was not till the bottom of the hill was reached, the pace relaxed, and the angle at which the girls had been inclined was reversed, so that they knew that they were being carried uphill, that they were able to open a pane in the glass front and cry out for the carriage to be stopped; and then but one face alone could engage this small opening. "Halloo!" exclaimed the coachman, and bounced off his seat on to the road, and putting up a hand, opened a portion of the window. "By the pipers, who be here?"

"It be we," replied Jane.

"And who be we?" asked the driver, walking by the side of the carriage, looking in with a face full of amusement and admiration. He had cause to be amused, and to admire. The situation was certainly a droll one. The two girls had gone into a trap that had shut on them, and he had them in his power. He had cause to admire, for they were both girls of remarkable beauty, fair in complexion, with a pure rose in their cheeks, eyes blue as the speedwell, and hair like spun gold.

"'Pon my word!" laughed the driver, "which is which?" He meant that both were so much alike, that one was the counterpart of the other.

"Who be you, maidens?" he asked, as he walked alongside of the imprisoned damsels, laughing and looking mischievous.

"Us be Joan and Jane Westlake," answered the timid Jane. "Us were going to our aunt to Whiteslade."

"What—to Snaily House?"

"I reckon some folks do so call it. Do'y now let us get out."

"And where do'y come from now?" he asked, without acknowledging the petition.

"Us be from Chudleigh. Since Aunt Susanna's death at Snaily House, Aunt Sarah be that terrible lonely, her has sent for we."

"Going to feed you on snails, be she?"

Neither girl answered this question.

"Be you going to live with she?" asked the driver.

"Yes, I reckon. Some one must be wi' aunt, and Jane can't go wi'out I, and me can't be separated from Joan."

"Then you be sisters?"

"Aye, twins."

"Thought so; you're like as two blooms

on one stalk, and two purty berries on one witch-beam (mountain-ash) branch; or two gladdys (yellow-hammers) singing in one tree."

"Can't you now let us out, and stay makin' remarks?" asked Joan.

"It's getting late," said the driver. "The night will be set in another hour."

"More's the reason we should be on our feet, and away to Whiteslade."

"I be purty sure you'd niver find your way in the dim'mets (dusk), and you'd get lost on the moor."

"Then let us out."

"That would be a cruel job—two lost innocent lambs in the howling storm and the pitch-black night."

"Let us out!"

"I'll see about you bein' put straight for Snaily House. You leave that to me."

Then the man jumped on the box, lashed the horse, and away whirled the trap down a hill at a rapid pace. He had shut and buckled the window. Communication with him could be had only through the one pane that opened inwards.

Thenceforth he remained on the box, and would listen to neither entreaty nor expostulation. The girls were carried on beyond that point of the road where they believed they ought to have turned on to the pathless heath, they could do nothing to extricate themselves, and finally they sank back on the cushions, sobbing with vexation and alarm.

And yet—there was an element in the situation that prevented them from being over-vexed and over-alarmed. The driver —who was Joe Leaman—was a young, handsome, good-natured man. His face was open and full of sunshine. It was not possible for the girls to think that he intended other than kindness, though that kindness might be irksome and contrary to their wishes.

Suddenly he whisked through a gate, and in another minute drew up in front of a small, stone-built, slated inn—"The Fox Brush." Now he came to the side, opened the window, unbuttoned the apron, and held out his hand to assist the girls to descend.

"You must excudge me, maidens," he said. "But I weren't going to let two white doves like you go flittering over the moor at nightfall, an' any number o' hawks about. So I've just brought you to my house, where ou'd mother, her'll take kear o' you, and you shan't want for nothin', and to-morrow I'll just go wi' you to Snaily House. And, moreover," he added, with a laugh, "I thought as how before goin' there to feed on slugs, you'd best have a good supper off Dartimoor mutton."

"We must go to Aunt Sarah," expostulated Jane.

"You can't do it, missie! It's miles away, and it's getting black night already. Come in, and don't mak' a pair o' fuils (fools) o' yourselves. Mother 'll look arter you both, and you'll bring a blessin' on this house—us 'll be entertainin' angels for sure; and us 'll make ye as welcome, and give ye o' our best, as did the ou'd Patriarch Abraham, when he were visited by like guests."

The girls were compelled by circumstances to submit. It was obviously impossible for them to make their way in darkness across the moor, where there was no path. The rain had settled in for a night of downpour. They entered the inn, and the young man in a few words explained to his mother who they were, and why they were present.

She received them without much graciousness, she was manifestly annoyed at her son's inconsiderate proceeding. He ought to have allowed the sisters to alight at Post Bridge, on the Dart, whence they could have followed the river to their aunt's, and if they did not know the way, might have engaged a boy as guide.

It was distressing to the girls to hear the remarks made by Mrs. Leaman, and they would gladly have escaped had this now been feasible; but a look from the door, the splashing of the rain against the window, as though buckets of water were discharged against the glass, showed them that to leave the house would be madness, and Joe did everything in his power to reconcile them to the inevitable, and to neutralise his mother's ill-humour.

Happily there was no stranger in the inn. The badness of the night prevented moormen from coming there for drink, so that the sisters had the house to themselves, and Joe had nothing to distract him from devoting his entire attention to them.

He endeavoured to amuse them, to dissipate their shyness, to interest them in the moor, to which they were strangers, and not a little to startle them with wild tales concerning it, of the Wish Hounds that hunted across it, fire-breathing black dogs said to course the wide wastes of a night, driven on by a mysterious hunter, whose horn may be heard, as well as his call to the dogs, but who himself is rarely if ever seen.

Next morning the sun shone brightly. The wind had fallen, and there was promise of a beautiful day. The moor grass twinkled with rain-drops, the cobwebs were strung with pearls, a delicate vapour like the finest gauze veil covered the landscape.

Under the guidance of their host, the girls started for the house of their aunt.

Reserve had given way under the genial influence of the good-nature of Joe, and his mother had relaxed her sternness when the sisters insisted on paying for their lodging and food. Joe had protested, blustered, but the girls had been resolute, and Mrs. Leaman eager to receive the pay. The girls Joan and Jane started cheerfully on their walk with Joe, who carried their bundles.

How fair these sisters were in the bright morning light! What sparkle there was in their brilliantly blue eyes! What a delicate changing glow on their smooth cheeks! What a lustre in their hair! And oh! the powers! said Joe to himself—what lips for a fellow to see and not to be able to kiss—for why? because he could not make up his mind which were the most kissable, those of Joan, or those of Jane.

"I wonder why you call Aunt Sally's house by its wrong name?" said Joan. "It was christened Whiteslade."

To this Joe only answered, "I hope you'll get summut better to eat than slugs and snails."

There was a story to account for the peculiar designation, but Joe Leaman had no mind to tell it. The story was this.

Two old maids had long lived at Whiteslade, a solitary cottage on the East Dart below Laughter Tor, hid behind a "clatter" of fallen rocks, overshadowed by half-a-dozen sycamore and ash trees. Here they had lived without ostensible means of subsistence for many years. They did not go to market, no dealer, miller, grocer came to their door, remote from every road. They employed no man to till their garden, and all they grew was a few potatoes and cabbages. Nourishing the moor air might be, but it could not sustain life unassisted.

The farmers for some time had missed sheep. At length suspicion was aroused; it was thought that these old sisters lured the sheep by charms to their habitation, and then killed them for their larder, or else that they went hunting them by night, riding broom-sticks.

The farmers assembled and surrounded the lonesome cottage, forced their way in, and found—jars full of salted slugs; not a particle of meat, not a trace of bones.

And now, the elder of the sisters was dead, and the nieces were on their way to live with the surviving aunt, whom they had never seen, and only heard of vaguely, so completely had these poor women kept themselves to themselves.

Joan and Jane were orphans, without father and mother, and they came to their surviving relative, Aunt Sally, of Snaily House.

Since the discovery of the potted slugs, the moormen had dealt kindly with the old women, had often sent them offerings of part of a sheep, or some portions of a pig when killed; cheese, butter, cake, had come to them from the farmers' wives.

The twin sisters were much astonished at the wildness of the way, the complete isolation of Whiteslade; and were a little dismayed at the prospect of living in such a home.

Joe escorted them to the paddock in which stood the house, and there left the sisters, that he might return to "The Fox Brush."

When he came home, he met his mother in the doorway. She looked more grim than ever.

"Well, Joe," said she, in harsh tones, "which is it to be?"

Joe took off his cap and scratched his head. A look of blank perplexity came into his honest eyes.

"One—for sure sartain," he said; "but dratted if I know which."

Next day Joe was engaged. Travellers passed along the road in the direction of Tavistock to market in the morning, and in the opposite direction, returning from market, in the evening.

But the day following was Saturday, when a Sabbath rest fell on the high-road—that repose which ever succeeds a market day.

Then Joe got his stick, put on his hat, and buttoned his gaiters.

"Where be you off to now?" asked his mother.

"I be going to Snaily House."

"What for?"

"I want to see as the ou'd woman there ain't a-feeding of them lovely sisters wi' slugs. And, mother, I reckon there's a bit o' thickey (that there) veal-and-ham pie left. I think as I'll take it wi' me. I can't a-bear to believe as them beautiful coral lips be a-consuming of snails."

"Which coral lips, Joe?"

The young man's face became perturbed. "That's just what I be going to find out," he answered.

When he returned in the evening he sat himself by the fire, threw out his legs, and said, "Mother, I do believe as it must be Joan."

But as he said Good-night to his mother some hours later, he muttered: "I made a misreckon, mother — Jane is the maid for me."

II

For the first time in the lives of these sisters a small thorn, causing some pain and estrangement, had entered their hearts.

Alas! Joe Leaman was the cause.

When the young man appeared on the furzy hill opposite, descending among the granite boulders, with his sheep-dog barking and gambolling before him, then each sister felt at once a gleam of sunshine in her heart, but that same gleam produced also its shadow. For each thought—He has come for me—and, Oh! if my sister were not here!

Moreover, when, after having done some kind act, as patching up a broken door, thatching a rotted roof, piling up the moor stones that walled in the little garden, Joe went away without having spoken definite words encouraging either to believe that she was his chosen one, then Joan, with some bitterness, resented the pertinacity with which Jane had clung to her, and had refused to leave her alone for half-an-hour with Joe, to give him that opportunity which he had doubtless sought, and for which he had purposely come.

And Jane in her gentle soul felt a pang of disappointment, because Joan had neglected to do the necessary cooking that day, and had not left her alone with Joe Leaman.

In fact, each sister was jealous of the other sister. Each was suspicious of the other. Each begrudged the other that happiness she looked to obtain for herself.

Outwardly, the twins were as attached and as inseparable as before, and yet each was aware that a barrier was rising that alienated their hearts from each other. Each struggled against this feeling. Each tried hard to imagine the other as the wife of Joe Leaman, and herself content that it should be so, and yet—so rebellious, so masterful is the human heart, that neither could control it, and bind it down to feel as good sisterhood would require it.

Jane felt a pang in her heart whenever Joe smiled on and addressed a pleasant word to Joan, and Joan was uneasy and jealous whenever Joe's attention was unduly engrossed by Jane.

The sisters had small means of their own.

They were not in the condition of abject poverty that had forced their aunts to live on pickled slugs. The two old women had been too proud, too independent to turn to their relatives for help, when they occupied a tenement for which they were required to pay nothing, and could maintain life on what nature so bountifully supplied, the huge, fat, black slug that battened on the delicate grass of the moor, and that was a game sought by none, begrudged them by nobody.

Now that one of the old women was dead, the sister who remained, Aunt Sally, had to be weaned, gently yet firmly, by the girls from her "snaily meals," as they called her diet on fresh or potted slugs. They persisted, with perhaps cruel kindness, for it was certain that Aunt Sally did not thrive on good mutton and white bread as she had on the old rye cakes and moorland slugs.

Or was it that the presence of two fresh charming nieces in exuberant life was overpowering to the poor old woman, accustomed for many years to no other society than that of her silent and slow-moving sister?

Both Joan and Jane were considerate and kind to the old creature, they could not have been more so. But habit had become so strong with Aunt Sally that she could not accustom herself to anything other than that mode of life to which she had been accustomed in her sister's time, any more than she could to the change of diet. Her birthday came, and with it a couple of ducks, the present of Joe Leaman.

"Ducks! Oh! Ducks!" exclaimed the twins with one voice. "We'll have 'em for supper, and eat auntie's many happy returns and good health in 'em."

But—alack-a-day and well is me! as Joan said afterwards—"It was them ducks did it."

What the ducks did was to finish off Aunt Sally. She ate heartily of roast duck, and relished what she had not tasted for fifty-three years, and in the night had a stroke of apoplexy.

She was speechless next day, but on the second day recovered a little power in her tongue. She could recognise her nieces, hold their hands, and she spoke.

"Don't be troubled," she muttered, "the duck did it. I ain't accustomed to duck—only to snails."

"Shall us send for a doctor?" asked one of the sisters, partly of the aunt, partly of the other.

"Joe said as how in extreme cases the doctor from the prisons out to Princetown were allowed to come."

"I want no doctor," said the sick woman. "Duck did it. This be a wicked world for sure—ducks is terrible rich—and there was the ingin stuffin' too."

Then her mind began to wander.

"Shall us send for Mr. Coaker, the Wesleyan local?" asked Jane.

"I reely don't know," said Joan. "Auntie, be you happy? Be you feeling comfortable?"

"Duck!" whispered the patient, pointing to her bosom.

"I mean elsewhere?" said Joan.

But Aunt Sally had passed into semi-unconsciousness.

The sisters sat watching her for some minutes in anxiety and doubt.

Presently a smile broke out on the old woman's face, just such as comes over the landscape after a rainy day, when at sundown the cloud masses are lifted slightly at the horizon, and a flood of brightness and beauty envelops the scene.

Jane bowed over her aunt, kissed her, and whispered—

"What is it, auntie darling?"

"I reckon I sees Susanna," she replied—Susanna was the sister who was dead. "Her's all a-blazin' wi' light; and, oh my! ain't the fields green and shining too—and such fat 'uns."

"Fat what, auntie?"

"And lots—scores——"

"What? Lots of what, dear?"

"Snails. Susanna is a pickin' of 'em. I be comin', Susanna; keep some for me!"

She never spoke again.

When Aunt Sally was buried in Widecombe churchyard, then the sisters Joan and Jane had to consider what they should do—whether remain at Snaily House, or return into the world; whether subsist as they well could on their tiny income in this lonesome spot, or separate and enter service.

They elected to remain. Independence was a great boon. They loved each other, and could not endure the idea of being parted. The thought of Joe retained them. Surely now he would make his election, and then the one who was put aside would leave and swallow her disappointment elsewhere, and in new scenes, among new acquaintances, try to forget Joe and become reconciled in mind to her sister being chosen instead of herself.

But Joe did not speak, or rather he spoke in such a manner as to raise equal expectations in the hearts of both.

They told him that it had entered into consideration with them whether they should leave Whiteslade.

"Oh, don't do that! Whativer should I do wi'out you?" exclaimed Joe. "Besides, it mayn't be so long before—before I——" then he paused and looked at Joan and next at Jane, significantly. "You know what I mean," he said, confidentially. "You know what brings me over the moors to Snaily House."

"Oh, Joe!" said Joan. "Do'y think us could have it put on auntie's tombstone as she died o' duck?"

"Because," explained Jane, "folks do say such tales about the snails; and it wasn't snails at all, it was duck did it."

Time passed—a year—another year, and the two girls remained at Snaily House, living on quietly, happily, but always with a little jar in their affection for each other, a little fly in their cup of happiness; always with a fearful looking forward to the moment when Joe would decide which of the two he would take. And each sister felt that when that decision was made, even if he chose her, there would be in her heart an ache almost overbalancing the happiness, at the thought of her sister's disappointment, sorrow, and desolation when parted from her, and left alone in the world.

Then Joe's mother died.

She had been an obstruction all along. She had not relished the prospect of having "one o' them Snaily House maidens" as a daughter-in-law. She had grumbled whenever Joe took presents to the girls. She had found fault with him equally for his persistence in going to see them, and for his inability to decide which he would select.

The sisters had come to understand that the eventful day of proposal was postponed throughout the life of the mother, because of her opposition.

When she was gathered to the dust, then this difficulty was removed. Joe must certainly have some one to manage "The Fox Brush," and whom could he take better than either Joan or Jane Westlake? But it was manifestly improper for him to think of such a thing immediately after his mother's death. He could not marry when in deep mourning. And yet the house must be carried on.

Accordingly Joe's sister Betsy, who had recently lost her husband, came, and soon laid hold of the reins and conducted the public-house in a masterful and experienced manner.

The year passed, and the band six inches deep of black crape that Joe wore on his Sunday hat had shrunk to one of an inch and a half. But he had not spoken. He still visited Whiteslade. He still professed the warmest regard for the sisters—equally.

Sometimes, it must be confessed, there was an effusiveness in his manner, combined with a watery look of the eye, combined also with a certain atmosphere that pervaded him, which made the sisters shrink. Was it the case that Joe was taking to drink—good-natured, generous, harmless Joe?

"You see," said Joan, "he is a publican, and he *must* sometimes for good fellowship take a drop with those who step in."

"And then," said Jane, "he is so amiable, he can't refuse nobody—and—it's good for trade."

However much the sisters might to each other excuse this fault in Joe, neither could conceal from herself that it was morally inexcusable in a young man, and might lead to very serious consequences.

In fact, Joe was falling into the vicious habit of taking nips of the spirits and ale which he distributed. He was, possibly, helped to this evil habit by the irresolution in his own mind as to what he was to do with himself, to which of the sisters he was to offer his hand and "The Fox Brush." An irresolute man is a weak one. He often is conscious of his irresolution, and seeks to find strength outside of him instead of in his own moral nature.

Joe's sister, Mrs. Betsy Squance, was a strong-minded woman, not particularly scrupulous where her own interests were concerned. She had made up her mind, in the event of her remaining a widow, to spend the rest of her days at "The Fox Brush," and that could only be by the exclusion of one or other of the twin sisters at Snaily House.

She used her superior force of character to dissuade her brother from marriage, not openly but by various underhand methods, and she allowed him unreproved to contract the habit of taking liquor; for the more he thus weakened his moral vigour, the less likely he was to come to a decision relative to the sisters, the more sure she was of maintaining her position behind the bar—

a position where, as she considered, she might catch a successor to the late Thomas Squance. Should she succeed in doing this, then, indeed, Joe was heartily welcome to take to him one or both of the twin sisters —for aught she cared.

So passed another year. Now the inch and half strip of mourning had been discarded from Joe's hat. Still the sisters were at Snaily House, still Joe remained in hesitating admiration of both, in uncertainty which he most admired, and in trepidation how Betsy Squance would take it, did he come to a decision and make his election.

One cold, stormy night Joan and Jane were sitting over their peat fire. They owed their peat to Joe. He had lent his horse and cart to draw it for them after it had been cut and set up to dry, and Joe had sent a man to cut their peat for them. Joe himself had stacked it for them.

The whole house was fragrant with the smoke, for the wind that drove down the glen sent puffs out of the chimney into the room. It is said that consumption is unknown on Dartmoor. This is perhaps due largely, if not wholly, to the turf smoke—

strongly antiseptic—that pervades every dwelling.

The sisters were not speaking, each was knitting a stocking for Joe—Joan one for his right leg, Jane one for his left leg. They had begun the task simultaneously, and had got just the same distance with each. Each sister was occupied with the same thought, and that thought was—*But for my sister*, I should be Joe's wife. My sister stands between me and the man I love.

And yet each innocent, generous heart twinged at the thought; for each dearly loved the other. The sisters lived in greater comfort at Snaily House than would have been possible elsewhere. Their little garden brought forth all the vegetables they needed. The moor provided them with fuel. They kept a pig. They kept a cow. The moor provided the cow with pasturage winter and summer alike. The marshy portions of the moor furnished rushes wherewith to thatch their house, and those of cow and pig. The hill-sides supplied a stack of bracken that made the richest, softest bedding for the cow. There was really very little that they needed which was not furnished by the moor. They made their own rush candles.

They spun their own wool. They even ground their own flour in a hand-mill, an old tinner's pounding quern that they had found lying near Whiteslade.

The sisters were startled by a knock at the door; it was thrown open, and in staggered Joe—much the worse for liquor.

"Come in, Thomas Over!" he shouted; "I've won my bet."

Then he stumbled towards the fireplace.

"I've laid five shillings," he said, "with Tom Over. He sez—sez he—you live on snails, as did the old women. I sez—sez I—you don't. Five shillings. Done. Five shillings. Drat it! where be Tom Over to?"

Then he threw himself down before the fire, and began to chuckle.

"There bain't no snails here. We'll drink that five shillin' out. That us will. Thomas Over!" he began to shout. Joan looked at Jane in dismay, and Jane at Joan in disgust.

The wind blew down the chimney and carried a drift of smoke before it over the prostrate man, and powdered him with white ash-dust, light and white as snow.

"Tom Over!" he shouted again, "I give y' leave to go all through the house, and look where you will, you'll find no pots o' pickled slugs as in the ou'd women's time. Tom Over! out wi' them five shillings."

He laid his head on his arm—began laughing and muttering to himself, and fell asleep.

The sisters remained where seated, the head of the inebriated man at the feet of Jane, his boots at the feet of Joan. The red glare of the glowing turf fire was on his puffed, heavy face.

Joan stood up, went to the door, listened without, and heard, far away, a voice calling; then she shut the door, barred it, and drew down a blind to prevent the light from within shining forth and serving as a guide to the lost, drunken Over.

That done, she came back to her place and reseated herself. For more than an hour the eyes of the sisters rested on the man at their feet. There were still youth and good looks in the face, there was something finely moulded in the nose and chin, but the fair picture had been drawn through beer-slops, and its beauty was effaced. And as each looked, the thought worked in each brain—Supposing he had taken me, and I had gone to be mistress of "The Fox Brush"; then could I have withheld him from the evil course which he has taken? Could I have found in such a weak, easily deflected character a stay for my soul, an equivalent for the love of my dear sister, a lot happier than this one, so peaceful in Snaily House?

And then rose up another thought in each mind. How is it that I am not the wife of this drunken sot? How is it that I have been saved against myself? Had Joe asked me to be his, inevitably I would have put my hand in his, with a "Yea." But he never did ask me that question which would have altered the whole course of my life. Why? Because he never could resolve in his own heart which of us sisters he cared most for. But for the presence of my sister, what a lot would have been mine!—a lot of disappointment in the man of my choice, of vain struggles to restrain him from his evil proclivity, of heartache, of sullen despair, of shame and ruin; for what else can such a course lead to but the loss of everything that constitutes happiness, and the withdrawal of prosperity from the house owning a drunken master?

The sisters held their breath with a catch. Joe was moving—he was awake.

He raised himself on one elbow, thrust his hand through his matted hair, and stared dreamily, stupidly about him.

"Where be Tom Over to? I want my five shillings."

Then he looked hard at Joan, next at Jane.

"Lor' bless me!" said he. "Whativer carr'd I here? But it don't matter now I be here. I remember, I came of a purpose. There's my sister Bess, she's gone and took Tom Over, and they be goin' to set up a public to Post Bridge together—and——" he looked at one sister, then at the other. "And—so, I reckon I must make up my mind now—and take——"

Then Joan rose—so did Jane.

And Joan clasping her sister round the waist, and Jane throwing her arm round her sister's neck, the two graceful girls stood above the stupefied man, who tried vainly to stagger to his feet. The red firelight glowed in their fair faces, making the blush of anger and annoyance deep in hue, deep as a crimson mountain rose.

"I have made up my mind—I will take——"

Joan cut him short.

"We also have made up our minds. You will take neither of us. Leave this house, join your drunken companion."

Then each sister spread her arms, and sobbing, fell on the other's bosom, exclaiming—"Oh dear, dear sister, how can I ever thank you enough—that you saved me from—from myself?"

EPHRAIM'S PINCH

A LITTLE on one side of the track that leads to Widecombe in the Moor, and that branches from the main artery of travel which runs from Tavistock to Moreton Hampstead, and thence to Exeter, is an ancient tenement in the midst of the waste, called Runnage.

A word on the ancient tenements.

From time immemorial certain spots on the moor have been favoured, as lying to the sun, having shelter from the winds, as near pure springs of water, and as possessing tracts of somewhat deep soil. The first who settled in these pleasant spots were primeval colonists far away in the gloom that precedes history; but ever since, these sunny slopes have been held by persons who claimed a prescriptive right to the dwellings and the enclosures around. The holders of these tenements hold under the Prince of Wales. As little trout are devoured by great trout, so has it been on the moor. The Duchy of Cornwall has bought up these freeholds whenever it has had the chance. In 1344 there were forty-four; in the beginning of last century the number had shrunk by ten, and now is further reduced to ten. Singularly enough, the owner of one of these is—the Poor of Brixham.

Runnage lies in a very lonesome spot—the hills that fold about it to the back and west afford sufficient shelter for sycamores to have grown to a considerable size—sycamore, the one tree which will hold its own anywhere.

The tenants of these holdings enjoy great rights by custom. The heir of each and every one, on the death of each and every tenant, has by custom the privilege of enclosing eight acres of the forest or waste ground, paying therefor one shilling annually to the Three Feathers; and this enclosure is called a new-take. No wonder that the Duchy of Cornwall does all in its power to rid itself of these encroaching neighbours. The new-take walls have wrought the destruction of the rude stone monuments; avenues of upright stones, circles, cromlechs, kistvaens have been ruthlessly pillaged, used as quarries which have been handy. In a great many cases the largest upright stones have been seized upon as gate-posts, or thrown across the leats and rivers as bridges, or have been utilised to prop up linhays, and the lesser stones that perhaps commemorated some insignificant tribesman have been left, whilst the great menhir set up in honour of his chief has disappeared. Sometimes the builders of the new-take walls threw down a great monolith with the intention of breaking it up, and then abandoned it because they found smaller stones more handy; sometimes they transported such big stones part way to the new wall, and cast them down, as being too heavy for their arms to convey any further. The marvel is that so much still remains after over a thousand years of wanton ravage.

Runnage tenement-house is new. The ancient farm dwelling has been rebuilt in recent times, but at the time of our story the old dwelling was standing. It was a typical moor-house. A gateway in a high wall of rude granite blocks built up without mortar gave access to a paved courtyard, very small, into which all the windows of the house looked. Here also were the outhouses, stables, pig-sties, the well-house, the peat store, the saddle and farm implement houses. All opened inwards, all could be reached with very little exposure. The main door of the dwelling did not open into the kitchen, but into a sort of barn in which every sort of lumber was kept, with the fowls roosting on the lumber. This served as a work-house for the men on rainy or foggy days; here they could repair damaged tools, hammer out nails and rivets, store potatoes, nurse the sheep in "yeoning time," prepare the rushes for thatching. Here at the end were heaped up high to the roof vast masses of dry bracken to serve as bedding, and in this, in bad weather, the children played hide-and-seek, and constructed themselves nests. At Runnage at one time lived the substantial tenant, Quintin Creeber, paying to the Crown a slight acknowledgment, and thriving on the produce of his sheep and kine and horses. He tilled little grain, grew no roots. There was always grass or hay for his beasts. If the snow lay on the ground deep, then only had he recourse to the hayrick. What little grain he grew was rye, and that was for the household bread.

Quintin Creeber had a daughter, Cecily, or as she was always called Sysly, a pretty girl with warm complexion, like a ripe apricot, very full soft brown eyes, and the richest auburn hair. She was lithe, strong, energetic ; she was Quintin's only child, his three sons were dead. One had been killed in a mine, one had died of scarlet fever, and the third had fallen into the river in time of flood, and had acquired a chill which had carried him off.

Sysly would be the heir to Quintin—inherit Runnage, his savings, and the right, on her father's death, of enclosing another eight acres of moor. On the loss of his sons, Quintin had taken into his service one Ephraim Weekes, a young man, broad-shouldered, strongly built, noted as a constructor of new-take walls. Ephraim had a marvellous skill in moving masses of granite which could not be stirred by three ordinary men. It was all knack, he said, all done by pinching, that is to say, by leverage. But he used more than a lever—he employed rollers as well. Without other than a ready wit, and a keen estimation of weights and forces drawn from experience, Ephraim was able to move and get into place blocks which two and even three other men would avoid touching. He was not a tall man, but was admirably set and proportioned.

He had fair hair and blue-grey eyes, a grave, undemonstrative manner, and a resolute mouth.

Instead of wearing hair about his face, it was Ephraim's custom to shave lip and cheek and chin; the hair of his head he wore somewhat long, except only on two occasions when he had his hair mown by the blacksmith at Widecombe; one of these was Christmas, the other midsummer. Then for a while he was short-cropped, but his hair grew rapidly again.

He was a quiet man who did not speak much, reserved with the farmer, and not seeking companionship at the nearest hamlet of Post Bridge, where was the tavern, the social heart of the region.

Ephraim was the younger son of a small farmer at Walna, a house with a bit of land that had been parted off from Runnage tenement at some time in the tenth century. Walna could not maintain four men, beside the farmer and his wife, consequently the youngest, Ephraim, was obliged to seek work away from the parental house, and he had been employed repairing fallen walls, and constructing new ones, till Quintin Creeber had engaged him as a labourer on his farm. Not for one moment had it occurred to the owner of Runnage that this might lead to results other than those of business between master and man—that it was possible Ephraim might aspire to Sysly, and his daughter stoop to love the labouring man.

It was quite true that in the matter of blood the Creebers and the Weekes were equal, but a moorman is too practical a man to consider blood; he looks to position, to money. The husband he had in his eye for his daughter was a man who had capital wherewith to develop the resources of the farm, to enlarge the new-takes, to break up fresh soil, to buy well-bred horses, and double the number of oxen, and quadruple that of sheep kept on the farm and the moor over which he had free right of common. Quintin would have hesitated to take into his employ Killeas, that is to say, Archelaus Weekes, the eldest son of his neighbour at Walna, a handsome fellow, with a song or a joke always in his mouth, who loved to romp with the girls, who liked his glass at the tavern; but Ephraim was different; what girl would care for him, plain, silent, without wickedness (*i. e.* mischief) in him, who never made or understood a joke?

Sysly was aged seventeen when Ephraim,

a man of twenty-three, came into the service of Quintin Creeber. He served faithfully for seven years, and never gave the farmer cause to reproach him for inactivity, was ever docile, obliging, and industrious. Such a man was not to be found elsewhere; such a combination of great strength, skill, and sobriety. Creeber esteemed himself most lucky in having such a servant. Ephraim did more than two other men, and never asked for increase of wage, never grumbled at the tasks imposed upon him.

When the seven years were over, then Sysly was twenty-four, and Ephraim was thirty. There had come suitors for the girl—among them the eldest son of the farmer Weekes, the light-hearted, handsome Killeas. She had refused him. The young farmer of Belever had sued for her, and had been rejected, greatly to the wonder of Quintin. Now when the seven years were over, then Ephraim, in his wonted quiet, composed manner, said to the owner of Runnage: "Maister, me and your Sysly likes one another, and we reckon us 'll make one. What sez you to that, maister?"

Quintin stared, fell back in astonishment, and did not answer for three minutes, whilst he gave himself time for consideration. He did not want to lose a valuable servant. He had no thought of giving him his daughter. So he said: "Pshaw! you're both too young. Wait another seven years, and if you be in the mind then, you and she, speak of it again." Ephraim took Quintin at his word, without a remonstrance, without an attempt to persuade him to become more yielding.

He remained on another seven years.

Then Sysly was aged thirty-one, and he—thirty-seven. On that very day fourteen years on which he had entered the house at Runnage, exactly when the seven years were concluded, at the end of which Farmer Quintin had bid him speak of the matter again, then Ephraim went in quest of him, with the intent of again asking for Sysly. He had not wavered in his devotion to her. She had refused every suitor—for him. He found the old man in the outer barn or entrance to the house; he was filling a sack with rye.

"I say—Ephraim," he spoke as Weekes entered. "There's the horse gone lame, and we be out of flour. What is to be done? Sysly tells me there bain't a crumb of flour more in the bin, and her wants to bake to once."

"Master," said Ephraim, "I've waited as

you said this second seven years. The time be up to-day. Me and Sysly, us ain't a-changed our minds, not one bit. Just the same, only us likes one another a thousand times dearer nor ever us did afore. Will y' now give her to me?"

"Look y' here, Ephraim. Carry this sack o' rye on your back to Widecombe mill, and bring it home full o' flour—and I will."

Then he hastily went out.

He had set the man an impossible task. It was five miles to the mill, and the road a mountainous one. But he had put him off—that was all he cared for.

In the room was Sysly. She had heard all.

She came out; she saw Ephraim tying up the neck of the sack.

"Help her up on my back, Sysly," said he.

"Eph!—you do not mean it! You can't do it. It's too much."

"He said—Carry this sack to Widecombe mill, and bring 'n back full o' flour, and you shall have her."

"It was a joke."

"I don't understand a joke. He said it. He's a man of his word, straight up and down."

Sysly helped the sack up. But her heart misgave her.

"Eph!" she said, "my father only said that because he knew you couldn't do it."

"I can do it—when I see you before me."

"How do y' mean, Eph?"

"'Bring back the sack o' flour, and you shall have her.' Sys! I'd carr' the world on my back for that."

He was strong, broad-shouldered, and he started with his burden.

Sysly watched him with doubt and unrest.

Was it possible that he could reach Widecombe with such a burden? If he reached the mill, could he carry back the sack of flour? She watched him down the hill, and across the Wallabrook that gave its name Walna[1] to his father's farm. Then ensued an ascent, and she saw him toiling up the hill of Sousson's Moor with the sack on his back.

Was there any avail in his undertaking this tremendous exertion?

Surely her father, if he had intended to give his consent, would not have made it conditional on the discharge of such a task! Surely, if he had designed to make Ephraim his son-in-law, he would not have subjected him to such a strain!

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[1] Now corrupted into Warner.

Was it not probable that Ephraim would do himself an injury in attempting this impossible task?

Cicely knew the resolution, the love of the silent, strong-hearted man; she felt assured that he would labour on under his burden, toil up the steep slopes—struggle, with perspiration streaming, with panting lungs and quivering muscles, up the great ridge of Hamledon—that he would pursue his purpose till nature gave way. And for what?

She did not share his confidence in the good faith of her father.

She watched Ephraim till the tears so clouded her eyes that she could see the patient, faithful man no longer.

Hours passed.

The evening came on; and Quintin Creeber returned to the house.

"Where is Ephraim?" he asked. "I want to have the mare blistered—she can't put a foot to the ground."

"Ephraim is gone to Widecombe," answered Cicely.

"To Widecombe? Who gave him leave?"

"Father, you told him to carry the sack."

Old Creeber stood aghast.

"To carry the sack o' rye!"

"You told him he was to take that to the mill, and bring back flour."

"It was nonsense. I never meant it. It was a put-off. *He can't do it.* No man can. He'll chuck the sack down on the way and come back without it."

"He'll never do that, father."

Quintin Creeber was much astonished. The man had taken him at his word. The more fool he. He had attempted the impossible. Well, there was this advantage. When Weekes returned without the flour or rye, he, Quintin, would be able to laugh at him and say: "You have not fulfilled the condition, therefore—no Cicely for you."

Quintin Creeber walked out of his farm buildings and went to the Widecombe road.

"Pshaw!" said he. "The man is an ass. He couldn't do it. He should have known that, and not have attempted it."

As he said these words to himself, he discerned in the evening glow over Sousson's Moor a figure descending the path or road.

"By gum!" said the farmer. "It is Ephraim. He's never done it—he has come back beat. Turned half-way. How the chap staggers! By crock! He's down, he's fallen over a stone. The weight is too much for him descending. I swear—if I didn't know he were as temperate as—as—no one else on the moor, I'd say he were drunk, he reels so. There he be now at the bridge. Hah! he has set the sack down, and is leaning—his head on it. I reckon he's just about dead beat. The more fool he. He should ha' known I never meant it. What—he's coming on again. Up-hill! That'll try him. Gum! A snail goes faster. He has to halt every three steps. He daren't set down the sack, he'd never get her on his back again. There he is—down on one knee—kneeling to his prayers be he! or taking his breath? He's up again, and crawling on. Well, I reckon this is a pretty bit of a strain for Ephraim, up this steep ascent wi' a sack o' flour on his back, and four to five miles behind him."

The farmer watched the man as he toiled up the road, step by step; it seemed as if each must be the last, and he must collapse, go down in a heap at the next. Slowly, however, he forged on—till he came up to Quintin.

Then the yeoman saw his face. Ephraim was haggard, his eyes starting from his head; he breathed hoarsely—like one snoring; and there was froth on his lips.

Quintin Creeber put his hand under the sack.

"By gum!" said he. "Flour!"

It was even so. That man had carried the burden of rye to the mill, and had come back with it in the condition of flour.

Half supporting the sack, the farmer attended his man, as he stumbled forward, turned out of the road, and took the track to Runnage.

Ephraim could not speak. He looked out of his great starting eyes at the master, and moved his lips, but foam, not words, formed on them. They were purple, cracked, and bleeding.

So they went on till they reached the farm.

Then, in the outer chamber, without a word Ephraim dropped the sack, and sank against it and pointed to Sysly, who appeared in the door.

"Gammon!" said Quintin. "You weren't such a fool as to think to have she? Her's not for you—not though you've took the sack and brought 'n back again. Sysly—yours—*never!*"

The man could not speak. He sank, slipped down, and fell before the sack, that partly held him up. His head dropped forward on his breast.

"Look up, Ephraim. Don't be a fool," said the yeoman.

He was past looking up. He was dead.

On the old Ordnance map of 1809 I see that the steep ascent up which Weekes made his last climb, laden with the sack of rye flour, is marked—"Ephraim's Pinch."

As a moorman said: "That was a pinch for Ephraim—such a climb with such a weight after nine miles; but there was for he a worser pinch, when old Creeber said, 'It is all for nought. You shan't have she.' That pinched Ephraim's heart, and pinched the life out of he."

But I observe that on the new Ordnance of 1886 "Ephraim's Pinch" is omitted. Can it be that the surveyors did not think the name worth preserving? Can it be that Ephraim and his pinch are forgotten on the moor? Alas!—time with her waves washes out the writing on the sands. May my humble pen serve to preserve the memory of Ephraim and his Pinch.

LITTLE DIXIE

The western face of Dartmoor stands up boldly from the green rolling surface of well-parked and pasture land on the limestone and slate. It springs into the air very much like a seventh wave, and is tossed at points into serrated masses of granite, grey or white, as though the crest of the moor like a billow had broken into foam.

Beyond this long wave lies the cloven valley of the Tavy, that comes down from the central table-land of deep and fathomless bog, the great reservoir and urn whence are spilled the Taw, the Tavy, the Ockment, and the Dart.

The great Oriental rivers, Pison that compassed the land where was much gold, Gihon, Hiddekel, and Euphrates, flowed out of Paradise, the garden of all delights, but these four Occidental rivers issue from an utterly desolate, barren, uninhabited wilderness, which is visited by no bird, inhabited by no insect.

The four great Eastern rivers flowed out of Paradise into the bare world without the gates; the four Western streams leap out of a barren wilderness into the Garden of England.

Up the western slope of the great wave sweeping nearly two thousand feet into the sky is a subsidiary wave of lesser ranges rising on the back of this main billow; and the southernmost of these is called Doe Tor, on the maps, originally Daur Tor, the Hill of Waters, for the rocky mass springs out of a wide stretch of bogs, and is enfolded by a stream that dances in many white falls from ledge to ledge in a "goyle" that in remote ages, and down through historic times to our own, has been "streamed," that is to say, turned over and tossed into the air, and its gravel passed through water, to force the granite sand and pounded crystalline rubble to deliver up its tin.

When the wind blows from the east, then the air is full of moaning, for it tears its way through the rock castles and crag towers, the granite windows and unclosed natural doors, piping, screaming, sobbing, muttering, growling—all these sounds at a distance are combined into one mighty organ note, and far away to the west "the Roar of the Moor" is audible.

When the wind is in the east, another phenomenon becomes noticeable to those on the cultivated land westward, and that is "the Beam of the Moor." This beam consists of a broad belt of fog, greyish-brown, not dense in texture, nor deep in colour. It lies behind the crests of the great upheaved wave, it spreads above them in vaporous streamers, which streamers are locally called "the Strome." What the derivation of Beam is is not quite clear, but probably it means the same as Bar. It is perhaps like the great oaken bar put across the house-door in olden times, and verily when the Beam lies on the eastern horizon, the door of Dartmoor is shut. One thinks more than twice before ascending its flanks and facing the raging blast that is sweeping, nay mowing the great upland region, as with a scythe.

Under Doe Tor stands a farm. A few diminutive firs and twisted thorns form a shelter on one side. The house has shrugged its shoulders and drawn in its head behind turf banks and moorstone walls, and cowers under the shelter of the dwarfed trees.

Above it, eastwards, is a "clatter" of granite blocks, a chaos of large and small rocks thrown down and cast about by the last glacier as it withdrew from the moor, ten thousand—twenty thousand—any number of thousand years before history began.

On the other side of the farm are green meadows. The streamers in ancient times burrowed in the water threads that ran down from the upland, deepening their channels so considerably that they became effectual drains. Doe Tor Farm stands in the tongue of land between two such converging streams with their artificially deepened beds, and is thus delivered from morass, and rendered a dry, pleasant slope that catches and enjoys and utilises every sunbeam that slides over the moor flank.

Hard at hand is a brook of the purest crystal water. Available everywhere are stones to be piled up for defence against weather, and to make enclosures for cattle.

Just beyond the door or entrance to the tiny court before the farm lies an octagonal mass of granite, with a socket sunk in the midst, the base of one of the many rude crosses that anciently stood on the moor, marking ways, serving as boundaries, and often as places for prayer to moor-dwellers when weather forbade their making the Sunday and festival journey to church.

To reach Lydford, the nearest village with church, might have been risky at times, for at the bottom of the valley, drained into by these lateral streams, and dripped into leisurely by the morasses, flows the Lyd, to be crossed by stepping-stones, and these only when the river is not swollen by flood. After a heavy downpour the stream rises very rapidly and comes down with a swirl, covering the stones—on such occasions they cannot be used.

Over a long shoulder of moor lies a way to another farm named Redever, in a situation even more difficult of access. The writer remembers some twenty-five years ago being there and giving a coin to one of the wild shock-headed children that ran about in the kitchen. The child looked at the piece of money, turned it round, and rushed to her mother to ask what it was. It was the first coin of the realm she had ever seen.

One night the wind was in the east, and the moan and thunder of the wind-tide breaking against and over the serrated crags to the east of Doe Tor was almost deafening; gusts came hissing among the stunted spruce, and beating down the chimney with a guffaw like that of a practical joker, delighted to be able to scatter the glowing embers over the stone floor. By the fire were seated Oliver Whiddon and his wife, and a little back in the room, rocking his chair, a young man of about twenty, an intelligent youth with open face, and a look of decision in his eyes and mouth.

This was "Young Oliver," the only son, indeed the only child of the farmer and his wife. It had been the ambition and expectation of the Whiddons that their son would succeed to the farm, after having served them as their workman for an indefinite number of years. But that impetuosity and love of change which characterises the Englishman, which distinguishes him from the German and the Frenchman, uprooted young Oliver very speedily. As soon as he was able to earn money for himself he left Doe Tor and went to Mary Tavy, where mines had been opened that yielded silver-lead; and he became a miner, with all the love of adventure and of speculation inherent in the miner. His work was not many miles distant from the paternal home, and he returned every Saturday to Doe Tor, to spend his Sunday with his parents, but not to spend his savings there, as Doe Tor was precisely the place where it would be impossible to get rid of money otherwise than by throwing it into the morasses.

He was a quiet, sober youth, very shrewd, and he hoarded his earnings, or rather gave them to his mother to hoard for him.

The way by which Oliver the younger returned weekly from Mary Tavy was by Redever. His walk was wholly across moors, past the cairns raised over dead heroes at an unknown time, and across ancient lines of enclosure, when made no one could tell, nor by whom set up. Lines so ancient that the moss and peat had for the most part swallowed them, and they became distinguishable only in the slant rays of the setting sun. Oliver Junior did not pass a house since leaving his mine till he came to Redever. There he was on high ground, not far from the source of a streamlet that poured its liquid light over a granite lip, and spread itself over the path or track to the farm, and was too shallow to be provided with stepping-stones, and too insignificant to be bridged.

There, usually for the first time since he left his mine, did he hear a human voice, and that was one quite other from those he was accustomed to hear. It was the voice of a child singing over her work—singing, shrill, clear, with a twinkle in the voice and a bound in the tone, so full of life, so full of joy that Oliver felt his heart dance within him responsive to the song.

Not on every Saturday afternoon or evening did it chance to Oliver to see the singer; he could not see her on Monday morning, for then he left his home before daybreak.

Oliver always listened for the voice, always looked for the singer; and that was a pleasant Saturday evening to him when he saw Little Dixie—the singer—filling her pitcher at the lip of the stream, or coming from the turftye with her arms full of turves.

Little Dixie was the only child of Bartholomew Gloyne, the farmer at Redever. She had been baptized Dionysia, but her father, every one who knew her, considered that Dionysia was too much of a name for such a mite of a child, and she was called Little Dixie by her father, and by such persons as knew of her existence. The dog knew her by no other name. When her father said, "Go to Dixie," he ran to her, fawned and licked her face and hands. The fowls seemed to know her by that name—for when she brought them grain, she called to them, "Here be Dixie and your meat!" The pig knew her by that name. When she carried the sow her pail of wash, it was the child's sport to knock at the sty door and call, "Who is here come?" No answer. "Be it Mr. Gloyne?" No answer. "Be it James Perkin?"—that was the name of the only labourer retained at Redever. No answer. "Be it your own dear Little Dixie?" "Umph!" grunted the pig; whereupon the sty door was thrown open and the contents of the pail poured forth.

Rarely, most rarely, did Oliver have the chance of a word with Little Dixie.

Dixie was an active child. Her mother had died when she was seven. Since then she had been the only woman in Redever. She did everything for her father. She mended his garments, she knitted his hose. She washed the household linen; she cooked the dinner. She never lighted the fire, for on the moor the fire is never let go out. The writer knows one fire that, it is boasted, has burnt for over a hundred years, without having been extinguished and relaid.

On the raw, blustering night of our slight tale, the old folk were toasting their noses and knees over the peat fire, and the son was swinging in the chair. He was thinking. That same day as he returned past Redever, he had heard a strange voice, a voice harsh, denunciatory, and with neither elasticity, nor sparkle, nor youth in it. It was not engaged in singing, but in scolding.

"I reckon Gloyne he's been gwan and took a maidservant," said Oliver.

And now as he rocked, he mused. Whom could that maid have been scolding? Could it have been James Perkin? No; he had seen James going after the sheep. Surely no servant would scold Little Dixie? Who could the owner of that voice have been? And whom could she have been letting out at?

As these questions turned in Oliver's mind, the door was thrown open, and in the entrance stood—Little Dixie.

The wind rushed into the room and threw the embers into a white glare.

"I wish to know," said the girl, "be you a-wantin' to have a maid?"

"What—Dixie! come in," called old Oliver, and young Oliver thrust back his chair in amazement.

"Aye, I be Dixie sure-ly, and I want to know, be you lookin' out for a maid?"

"A maid?"

"Yes; vayther's gone and made a mess of hisself, and so I've comed away."

"Made a mess of hisself—your father?"

"Terrible," said Dixie. "He's gwan and married again. It's shameful, and me kept his house for 'n since I wor seven, that's seven years agone. All these seven years I've washed, and baked, and kept all vitty, and fed the pig and done everything for 'n, and now he's gwan and done this shameful—and made a mess of hisself."

"Have you left home?" asked Mrs. Whiddon.

"I reckon I've been turned out," answered Little Dixie. "Thicky old cat my vayther hev a-brought home—meaning my mother as he calls her—but she bain't no mother to me,—her and I don't agree. Her wants to take the washing, and the pigging, and the cowing, and the cooking, and the baking, and the turving out o' my hands—and I sed, sed I—I wouldn't stand it. I've washed and baked and pigged for my father these seven years—ever sin' mother died, and I won't hev no alteration. So her just took me by the shoulders and dra'ed me out over the drexle (threshold)."

Little Dixie drew nearer the fire. "And now I sees it's all up at home; so what I wants to know is, do'y wish to have a maid? and what's your wages?"

"But what does your father say?"

"Say! Poor old man. He can't say nothink. He sits and cries and wipes his nose—'tis piteous to behold, and he be gettin' the end o' his nose quite raw wi' wipin'—he's cried such a lot, because this here cat o' a wife o' his lets on at me so. There's nothing like a little scald cream for a sore nose," added Dixie, confidentially. "Now, do'y want a maid? and what's your wages?"

The child was but fourteen. She hardly looked that, so fair was she, so silver silken-white was her hair, so open and blue were her eyes, so wholly childlike was her form.

Then young Oliver started up.

"Little Dixie!" he said. "If you stay here will you sing?"

"I reckon I shall. I always did sing till that woman came."

He ran to a box, threw it open, pulled out a little sack in which jingled coin, and tossed it into Dixie's arms. "There," said he, "take of it what you will. You stay here—work and sing for father and mother, till—in three years I bid you work and sing for me."

At that moment, in at the door came

Bartholomew Gloyne. He looked about him and said—"There you are, Dixie. Come back. I have run after you. My wife didn't mean it. She did not intend to turn you out of the house. Only, you know, her must be top and leader in all, and can't let you, a child, do what you likes."

"Vayther," said the girl, "her turned me out and called me bad names."

"Her did not intend you to go, but you must come back now with I."

"I am not coming back."

"My wife—her said I was to force you."

"I won't be forced."

"But I am your father—I beg and pray you to come. Didn't you work for me, and tend me, and care for all my linen and meat ever since your mother's death?"

"I know I did."

"Well, and how can you have the heart to leave me now?"

"Vayther, you should ha' thought o' that afore you went and made a mess o' yourself. Now it's done. I reckon you promised to honour and obey."

"I reckon I did som'ut o' the kind."

"Well, you must go back, then, to she. You can't turn she out o' the door, as her turned I."

"No; I s'pose I can't. But you should consider me."

"It's you, father, as ort to ha' considered I afore you went to church wi' she. I won'ner now you warn't ashamed to do it!"

Then Oliver Whiddon the younger stepped forward, and slapped the forlorn and perplexed man on his shoulder.

"Look here, guv'nor," said he, "the little maid has come here and axed father and mother to take she as their servant, and they hev agreed for three years. And after that—I've axed she to come and keep house for me, and sing and work for me, and make me happy."

"So, father," said Little Dixie, with a curtsey, "you see—I'm engaged."

The man looked disconsolately at his child.

"And, father," she continued, showing the bag, "here's my wage."

The string became relaxed, unbound, and the money—all in silver—the savings of three years, poured forth in a glittering stream over the floor.

"Lawk!" said Gloyne, putting his hand to his head, "I didn't know your vally till now, and now I've lost you."

“ But I have known it for long,” said Oliver ; “ and a right wit has brought Little Dixie from one who couldn’t value her to one who—sweep up all that silver—knows that she is priceless.”

JONAS COAKER

Almost in the centre of Dartmoor is a singular depression. The hills fall away from all sides towards what seems to have been, at a vastly remote period, the bed of a lake. Nevertheless there is a fissure—a valley to the south through which the Dart, that traverses this basin, has sawn its way. It has had to rasp its bed through a dyke of rock just above that same Snaily House which has been already described, and till that dyke was sawn through, the basin was occupied by a sheet of rippling water. Now, however, that trough is encroached on by farms and fields, a tavern, a church, a Dissenting chapel, and a pair of grand porter's lodges, one on each side of a gate—leading to nowhere. In the time of the Prince Regent, great and chimerical ideas of the importance of Dartmoor filled certain heads, and a certain Squire Hullett resolved on building himself a stately mansion some mile or two up this basin, and began by planting a strip of beech beside the road, and by constructing two porters' lodges. Nothing further was done; even the road up to the site on which his mansion was to rise was not made; and now no one knows exactly where that site was to be.

There is one very interesting feature in this basin in the midst of the moors. It is traversed from east to west by three roads, all belonging to different epochs of civilisation.

First of all, there runs athwart it a paved causeway, that crosses Dartmoor from Tavistock to Bovey, and was in connection with the Fosse Way, that great diagonal line of communication between Cornwall and Exeter, to Lincoln, and thence by Doncaster to York, and so northwards. It was older than the Roman domination. It can be distinctly seen on Dartmoor, and a section at Post Bridge, where it is now in process of being demolished for the building of a wall. It is about six feet wide, and is paved in an arc, the pavement laid on a bed of smaller stones.

Next comes a road of a different kind, unpaved, of no construction whatever, cut by the hoofs of the pack-horses that travelled over it throughout the Middle Ages, and looking like a trench drawn by a huge plough in the face of the moor. That old pack-horse road is as completely disused now as is the old paved causeway.

Thirdly, we have the macadamised highway maintained by the County Council, smooth as a bowling-green, drawn out over the face of the moor like an unrolled measuring-tape.

But the existence of these three roads is not all that is interesting in this basin.

The hills around are, and were still more so, crowded with the remains of prehistoric peoples. Every slope was occupied by a village, surrounded by a ring of wall. Every height is crowned by the cairns and the rude stone coffins or kistvaens of their dead. In almost every field, along almost every track-way, may be picked up their flint chips, scrapers, and arrow-heads.

Now many of these ancient settlements have been converted into plantations or fields, modern walls have been constructed out of the ruined bee-hive huts, on top of the ancient outer wall of defence. Nevertheless, a great number of these remains still cover the sides of the hills; and a word on those who occupied such villages will not here come amiss.

It may be premised that every sort of theory has been propounded relative to these clusters of circular huts. They were shelters from wolves; they were pounds for sheep; they were the habitations of tin miners. They were Druidical circles; they were imitations of the constellations, forming temples for sidereal worship; they were mediæval miners' cottages, they are comparatively modern hovels.

The earth is the great book of reference for history. It must be turned over before history can be read. Theories are mere air till established by the pick and shovel. Now pick and shovel have been employed on these villages of bee-hive huts, and they have revealed something quite unexpected—that there dwelt on Dartmoor at a vastly remote epoch, before the written history of Great Britain begins, an extremely rude population in extraordinary numbers, living in the most savage manner, without the knowledge of metals, and with very little, and that very rude, pottery. In the centre of each hut was the fire. The door, always to the south, was so low that the hovel had to be entered on all fours. A segment of the circular hut on the higher side was raised as a dais or platform, with curb-stones, and was bedded with heather and rush, to form a seat by day and serve as a couch by night. All baking and roasting was done in the same manner as Catlin describes as among the Assiniboyne Indians. A hole was dug in the clay floor a foot or eighteen inches deep; this was the oven. Into it smooth pebbles from the river heated red-hot were put, along with the meat to be roasted. If water had to be boiled, a skin was made to line the hole; this was filled with water, and then the red-hot stones were thrown into it. Bed-places, hearth-stones, roasting-holes, roasters, remain where left thousands of years ago, before that Cæsar had crossed into Britain, aye, and before the Britons had come over and occupied our isle.

Rising out of the marsh—once a lake—is a gravelly margin, and there this ancient people sat chipping flints brought from afar, to shape them into arrow-heads and scrapers, the latter for the dressing of the skins in which they clothed themselves. And there, where they formed their tools, perhaps three thousand years before the history of our isle begins, may be gathered their broken tools and the chips of flint they cast aside as unprofitable.

On a gentle incline descending towards the marsh is a singular circle of trees, surrounded by a wall; this enclosure goes by the name of Ring Hill. It is, in fact, an old walled village that has had the huts within the wall destroyed. The stones from these primeval bee-hive habitations have been removed and utilised for the construction of a quaint little farmstead, enclosed within rectangular walls to screen its windows and door from the hurricane and snow and hail. There has been a sort of attempt at picturesqueness in the little habitation, for it has been given pointed windows. The court-yard is paved with great slabs of granite, the sheds are buttressed with long posts of the same material laid at an incline to prop up the mortarless walls. Very white geese waddle about, dip their yellow bills into the water that occupies a trough dug out of a huge granite block. The white and crimson saxifrage has made a home of the walls, and rooted itself in every fissure between the stones, and the yellow stonecrop shows as a mass of sunshine on the roof. A rowan, or as it is called in Devon a witch-beam, grows near the cottage, so also a sycamore.

There is no road to this little farm, hardly a path. To reach it one must wade through water, and skip from tuft of rush to hummock of grass in the watery morass that intervenes between the road and the farm, a distance of half-a-mile.

On the way one stops to pick the potentilla that the goose loves so well, to disentangle the pink smothering bind-weed from the gorse-bush it is strangling, to look for the nest of the ring-ousel that we have started. But should the time be winter, then the marsh is scarce less glorious in colour than in summer. The mosses run the change from green to crimson, to gold, to snow-white; the surface is one wondrous carpet shot with the most varied and yet harmonious colours.

In Ring Hill homestead lived for some years a remarkable man, named Jonas Coaker, and there he died in February 1890.

I visited him in 1888. He was born in 1801, so that he had almost reached his eighty-ninth year when he died. For some time he had been stone blind, and he was tended by an old woman who kept house for him. He was very poor, but patient, gentle, and uncomplaining.

When I saw him, he had but just been got down-stairs, and the old man was seated in an ancient leathern, high-backed chair. The light from the little window illumined his pale, finely-cut, intelligent face, which must have been handsome when he was young, and when the soul could look out of the windows, and when the teeth had not fallen from the gums. Now the golden bowl was cracked, and the daughters of music were low, and the pitcher broken at the fountain.

Jonas was considered, and considered himself, to be a poet. Alas! some persons conceive themselves to be inspired with the divine spirit of poesy if they can make *cow* rhyme with *bow-wow*, and *kitchen* with *pitching*. Jonas, it must be admitted, was a sorry poet, really was no better than an indifferent rhymster. Of poetic fire, of imagination, he had none, but he could knock lines together that jingled like horse-bells, and these pleased the unexacting ears of the moorland men.

Some years ago, Dartmoor was chosen as a field for military operations. Troops were sent down to camp on the moor, and there execute manœuvres, and conduct sham fights.

It was an unfortunate experiment. That year happened to be one of extraordinary wet. The troops arrived, camps were formed, tents pitched, all was prepared, when the rain descended, the windows of heaven were opened and forgotten to be shut again all that summer.

The horses floundered in bogs. The men were drenched to the bone; accoutrements became sodden, boots resolved themselves into pulp, weapons became rusty, gunpowder would not ignite, tempers waxed ferocious.

On this occasion Jonas Coaker printed a number of his "poems," and went about among officers and privates selling them. The cost was but trifling, and he realised a comfortable sum. Owing to the never-ceasing rain, the soldiers had nothing to do but sit in their tents swearing; and Jonas Coaker's effusions were gladly purchased and even read, because there was nothing else to be got, in mid-moor, in mid-downpour.

On that occasion a company of Highlanders had a bad experience. Farmers' wives and daughters came to the camp offering Devonshire cream. The Highlanders eagerly purchased, and considering what they purchased to be mere curd, each man consumed as much cream at a sitting as if it were broase or curd. The consequence was that the whole company was down with a bilious attack, and the surgeon had to dose the entire kilted body of warriors with blue pill. Racked with headache, with yellow faces and orange-coated tongues, the Sawny brothers languidly cast their pennies to Jonas, and bought his poems, and read them only because too racked with bile to be able to read anything else, nor were they in a condition to appreciate the merits or demerits of what they read.

When I visited the old blind "poet"—let us call him *jongleur*, or jingler of rhymes—I was collecting the folk ballads and songs of the West of England. I found his memory stocked rather with his own productions than with traditional minstrelsy. However, he was able to give me a couple of ancient ballads; one was only recollected because he had recomposed it, and was proud to recite the original and place his own performance beside it for comparison. The alchymist turned base metal into gold. Alas! in this case it was the fine gold resolved into mere dross. One ballad, however, he had not rewritten, and very interesting it was. It related to the Commonwealth, and the exclusion of organ and musical instruments from the service of God. I was able also to recover the melody to which it was sung, and that was of the same date. The ballad began—

> "All ye that love to hear
> Music performed in air,
> Pray listen, and give ear
>   To what I shall perpend.
> Concerning music, who'd—
> If rightly understood—
> Not find 'twould do him good
>   To hearken and attend."

It proceeds to extol the church music and church musicians of Brixham, and then to relate how a new minister

> "In office and in gown
> Strove to put singing down."

Then the ballad writer goes on to argue with this new-light divine—

> "Go question Holy Writ,
> And you will find in it,
> That seemly 'tis and fit,
>   To praise and hymn the Lord,
> On cymbal and on lute,
> On organ and on flute,
> With voices sweet, that suit,
>   All in a fair concord.
>
> "In Samuel you may read
> How one was troubled,
> Was troubled indeed,
>   Who crown and sceptre bore;
> An evil spirit lay
> On his mind both night and day,
> That would not go away,
>   And vexed him very sore."

The ballad writer proceeds to relate how that Saul was advised to send for the son of Jesse—

"Now when that David, he
King Saul had come to see,
And played merrily
    Upon his stringed harp,
The devil all in speed,
With music ill agreed,
From Saul, the King, he fleed,
    Impatient to depart.

"Now there be creatures three,
As you may plainly see,
With music can't agree
    Upon this pleasant earth,
The swine, the fool, the ass,
And so—we let it pass,
And sing, O Lord, Thy praise
    The while that we have breath."

The self-laudation of the minstrels, their placing themselves on so high a pedestal, and the kick over of the preacher who does not value their performance into company with the Devil, the swine, and the ass, is vastly droll, and perhaps not a little characteristic of village musicians all Christendom through.

Jonas Coaker was at one time landlord of "The Warren Inn," said to be the loftiest situated road-side tavern in England. It stood on a piece of land which the owner regarded as his property through the right of squatting. It had this disadvantage, that it stood on the south side of the road, and was somewhat cheerless, facing the blustering northern gales, and with the sun never entering the rooms. Unhappily, a fire broke out, and the tavern was burnt down. The landlord determined to take advantage of the catastrophe, and rebuild in a more congenial situation, on the opposite side of the highway.

Masons, plasterers, carpenters, hod-men worked away, and the proprietor had pretty well expended all his hard-earned savings on the new house, when just as the last slate was nailed on, the Duchy of Cornwall agent came down on him, and said, "Now you are on Duchy land you shall pay rent for the inn you have built on *our* land without our gracious permission."

The old "Warren Inn" was the scene of the well-known gruesome story of the benighted traveller who was taken in one snowy winter evening and placed in a bedroom where was an oak chest. During the night he woke, the moon shone in at the little casement on the chest. It had dispersed the clouds. His imagination began to work. He was uneasy as to this chest; he got out of bed and crept to it, threw up the lid, and saw a dead man in it. Of course, no more sleep for him that night. Next morning he came down to his breakfast off a rasher of salt bacon, and eyed the cheery host and hostess with some suspicion. At last he ventured to mention what he had seen.

"Oh!" said the hostess, "it's only old vayther. The frost be that hard, the snow that deep, us can't carr'n yet awhile to Lydford churchyard to bury 'n, so us has salted 'n in."

The traveller pushed from him his plate with the rasher untouched.

Jonas Coaker had a somewhat lively time when landlord, for at that period the Vitifer tin mines near at hand were in full work, and the miners came there to drink and dance and brawl.

On one occasion when he refused to hand out more liquor, because his customers were becoming unruly, they combined against him, drove him from his own door, broached his barrels, and drank themselves dead drunk. Jonas was constrained, as he termed it, to play "hidey peep" on the moor so long as this turbulent crew held his premises, which they did till they had drained the last drop from his barrels and emptied all his bottles.

Then sobriety necessarily returned, and the miners felt they had gone too far. They went back to their work, and Jonas estimated what his loss had been, of course with a margin on his side, and they paid for their spree according to his valuation, which they were unable to check.

Jonas had long legs, a fine physique, and lungs like blacksmith's bellows. On one occasion he ran from Post Bridge to Exeter, a distance of twenty miles, up hill and down dale, without halt, in a little over four hours. He was then aged thirty.

His last occupation was rate collector for the parish of Lydford, the largest parish in England, that comprises within its bounds the major portion of Dartmoor, in fact nearly 57,000 acres.

Towards the end of his life the old man's mind was concerned with but one care—

"Oh dear life! whativer shall I do wi' myself when I'm dead?"

"What do you mean, Jonas?"

"I've no relations—no wife, no sons, no daughters, and I'm desperate poor. Lawk-a-dear life! whativer shall I do wi' myself when dead?"

A kind neighbour tried to reassure him.

"Jonas, doan't'y be terrified over thickey trouble. I'll see to'y that you be put away in Widecombe churchyard all vitty (suitably)."

"Thank'y, Cap'n" — he addressed the overseer of a mine on the moor not far distant, and such a person is always entitled "Captain."

"Thank'y, Cap'n. That's very kind of you. But how will'y get the men to carr' me?"

"There be men to Hexworthy mine."

"I reckon there be—let me see;" then he began to count on his fingers how many miners were there. "You see, Cap'n, it's not that I be such a powerful weight, but it's a cruel long way to Widecombe. I must have for sure sartain a change o' bearers." He considered a while. "You see, Cap'n, I can't ease 'em. I'd walk part o' the way to ease 'n if I could. But I can't. Oh dear life! whativer shall I do wi' myself when dead?"

"I assure you I will find you plenty of bearers."

"That's very kind o' you. But what if you be away on business when I die—whativer shall I do wi' myself then?"

"I'll tell my missus to send a man on horseback to the nighest telegraph-office and wire right off on end to me, and I'll come, I promise you, and leave my business so as to attend to you."

"That's uncommon kind o' you," said Jonas, "and I thank'y gratefully for the same; but supposing that the horse should cast a shoe—then, whativer shall I do wi' myself?"

"There is Will Fry can shoe the horse."

"But Will, he gets a drop too much occasionally. What a pretty job it would be if Will Fry were fresh, and ran the nail into the frog and lamed your horse—and all along o' me. Whativer should I do wi' myself then?"

"You need not trouble yourself about that, Jonas. The licence has been withdrawn from the inn, and it has now changed hands and has become a temperance hotel, so that Will cannot get drink there even if he desire it."

"That's a great comfort to me to think it. But, then, doan't'y fancy Will Fry might be that sulky and pervarse all along of not gettin' his drink that he might refuse to shoe the horse?"

"Then, Jonas, my horse shall go without his shoe."

"Thank'y, Cap'n; it is very good o' you

to say so, and no doubt you mean it kind. But if your horse fell lame on the road—whativer should I do wi' myself then?"

So he fretted—there was no relieving his concern; a fresh difficulty continued to start up as soon as an old one was laid. In his humble mind he supposed that no one could care sufficiently for him to give up a day's work to assist at his burying; and he had absolutely nothing of his own to leave, to pay for his funeral. After a friend had done everything to satisfy his scruples, he would put his hand to his white eyes, wipe the tear that trickled down his withered cheek, and recur to the same difficulty. "When I'm dead, whativer shall I do wi' myself?"

At last the dreaded day came; not the day of death—to that he had looked forward, not with blind eyes, but with eyes that saw through darkness into the unspeakable light beyond—but the day of burial, and all the moorside turned out to do honour to the kindly, good old poet. The day was Sunday, the 16th February, 1890. A frost was on the short turf, the sky was clear. The miners from Hexworthy were at Ring Hill in their best black; and away over the moors in the glitter of the sun on the sparkling, hoary grass and twinkling furze-bushes the old man was borne, followed by a great train of all who had known and loved him; and as the train swept over rolling hill, down into glen by brawling torrent, mile after mile, by old cairns and primeval walled enclosures, rose the hymn and psalm, swelling, ebbing, rising again—a river of music—till, as the funeral procession reached the head of Hamledon, a mighty wave of moorland, below which lies the church of Widecombe, the music of the bells ringing for afternoon service hushed the song of the bearers.

GOOSIE-VAIR

One day—that of Old Michaelmas Day—a friend and myself agreed to meet at Ward Bridge over the Walla, that foams down from its Dartmoor cradle, and to push up it together. He was to come from Plymouth to Horrabridge station, and to walk thence to the point agreed on, and be on the bridge at noon punctually. It was stipulated that I was to bring lunch for both.

Before leaving home my good wife, with that wonderful consideration that all good wives possess, said to me: "To-day is Goosie-Fair in Tavistock. It will not do for you to be within a few miles of the place, to pass through it, while reeking with preparations for a feast on roast goose, and not to have some. Besides, I know your tricks and your ways. When you smell the roast goose fumes, you will forget all about your friend and the appointment, and the scenery, and the poetry of the moor, and turn into some hospitable house for roast goose. There is cold goose in the larder. I will tell the cook to put in enough for you and Mr. Blank. You are sure to have a huge appetite, and I shall provide accordingly."

"All right," said I. "Angel of the Spheres! don't forget sage-and-onion stuffing. Goose without stuffing is like lamb without mint sauce, a title without an estate, a Frenchman without brag, and an Irishman without wit."

I started, and drove through Tavistock.

The town was crowded. Acrobats, showmen, organ-grinders, cheap-jacks, had congregated there. If there be one entertainment I love above all others it is listening to a cheap-jack. But I remembered my friend, I drove past. The streets were lined with stalls, the most inviting peppermint stick, in barbers' poles of pink and white, was exhibited. If there is one seductive sweet above another, it is peppermint stick. But I bought none. It is to be eaten after, not before, a meal. I considered my appointment, and drove on.

The atmosphere that enveloped the town was redolent with sage and onions, and the savour of roasting goose. Had not the best of wives put some of the article into the box of my dog-cart, I had never got beyond Tavistock that day.

Presently I was out of the fumes of roast goose, on Whitchurch Down, whirling past an old granite cross of the rudest description, and descending a hill, like the side of Salisbury steeple, to Ward Bridge.

I had expected to see my friend there already. I was somewhat behind my time, delayed by the density of the throng in the town. But no one was on the bridge.

I waited, and wondered.

The scene is one of extraordinary beauty. The Walla comes down from the moor in the turbulence of youth. The moor stretches it arms on each side. The river has sawn itself a cleft, and in this cleft, sheltered from the gales, growing out of every cranny between the granite block in chaos, start beech and birch and oak, thick and luxuriant as ambitions in a boy's mind. At this season —October—the woods were a veritable Aladdin's garden. The rowan, or mountain-ash, was a mass of coral. The wild guelder rose dense with berries, carmine and translucent, true carbuncles, the sloe-bushes blue with fruit as turquoise.

I looked over the parapet of the bridge into the limpid river. It tumbled among, it swirled about boulders of every size and shape. The stones, where submerged, were black and green with weed, that streamed down the current, and wavered, a very Berenice's hair, under the water, and in and out among it darted the black moorland trout, very small, but, as I well knew, excellent for eating. As I looked at them, I hummed to myself the words and strain of an old folk-song, relative to a Cornish volunteer who had been accidentally shot at Penrhyn during some May games more than a century ago—

"O Altarnun! O Altarnun! I never shall see more,
Nor hear the bells in its old tower, nor stand in the church door,
Nor list the birds a-whistling, nor in the Inney stream
See silver trout a-gleaming, as thoughts glance by in dream."

But these Walla trout are black and not silver.

There was no path up the river bank, this I knew. In order to ascend the valley I must mount the hill, and strike to the left by a farm that was occupied, and by another in ruins.

I became impatient. I was becoming

rampageously hungry, and that being the case, was cross. I thought—"That owl of a Blank must have disregarded arrangements and have preceded me up the road, and may be awaiting me at the top of the ascent."

A farmer jogged by. I asked him if he had seen a gentleman on the road. He replied that he had noticed some one by Turpin's cottage, but whether it was a gen'l-man or not, he could not say. He had not stayed to observe, he was late for Goosie-Fair—he might be too late for roast goose—at all events for the stuffing—sage and "ingins," he said, and had pushed on.

Accordingly I wrote on a piece of paper, torn from my pocket-book—

> "AS USUAL—*Late!* I have gone on with the goose to the cottage. Look alive, or I shall have eaten it all."

I was late myself in arriving at Ward Bridge, but that I overlooked in consideration of the egregiousness of the unpunctuality of my friend. Really, unpunctual persons are not fit to be allowed to live. They should be destroyed as nuisances.

I went up the hill, and turned in at a gate to the cottage—a humble, moor-stone cot, constructed without an atom of lime between the joints, and thatched with rushes.

The beech hedge to the garden was a ring of fire. The leaves had turned yellow, and the sun was on them; we were in the Martinmas summer.

The cottage door was open, and I entered.

Then I saw seated in a high-backed leather chair by the deal table, a man with a scarlet, white-spotted kerchief in his hand. He wore knee-breeches and blue worsted stockings. His hands were on his knees, one held the kerchief.

"I beg your pardon," said I. "Will you kindly inform me if a gentleman has been here?"

The man turned towards me.

Then I noticed that something was amiss with his eyes. There was a film over them, and they were inflamed. A tear trickled down each cheek. At the same time a short uncouth man appeared, risen from a low stool near the fire, where he had been seated; I had not observed him at first, as the doorway and chimney were on the same side of the apartment.

This man had a simple, somewhat childish face, and yet he was old, nearer seventy than sixty. He pulled his forelock and said, "Your service, sir!" He wore very light, dust-coloured corduroys, and a string was bound round his legs below his knees. "That's Thomas Coleman," he said, with a tobacco-pipe indicating the suffering man. "He's terrible put upon wi' his eyes. There, drat it all! I've scattered the trade on the floor."

The "trade" was the stuff wherewith he had been packing the bowl of the tobacco-pipe.

"You have not seen a gentleman—of a rather provoking description, always unpunctual—this way?" I asked.

"No, your honour," answered the short man, stooping to pick up the spilled "trade."

"Because," I said, "a farmer who was passing a few minutes agone told me he had observed some one in your garden."

"That were I," said the kneeling man. "I wor a-gittin' together the trade for Coleman's pipe."

"What! do you grow tobacco on the moor?"

"'Tweren't 'zacklie 'baccy," answered the man.

I looked round. There was a cauldron simmering over the peat fire, puffs of steam issued at intervals, and the cover rattled.

"So," said I, "you are not at Goosie-Fair. Almost every one else is there."

"Ees, I reckon," said the child-faced man; "us can't go, not Thomas Coleman nor me. Us couldn't abear it."

The man with bad eyes held up his scarlet kerchief to his face, and dried his moist cheeks.

"I fear you are suffering greatly," said I to him.

"I reckon it be so," answered he. "I've been growin' dim some while. I can't see, your honour, terrible sight. Well, I reckon it will come wor afore it cometh better."

"Have you had advice?"

"Aye, plenty o' that. I've been to the dispensary, and after that they sent I to the horse-spital, but lor bless'y, sir, the doctors wor all in one song."

"And that was?"

"That my eyes 'd turn reg'lar blind afore they growed better."

"Then they gave you *some* hope?"

"Nay! I win't say that nother."

"But surely you told me they would be better?"

"Ees, they'll come round agin."

"Well, that is something to hope for, something to look forward to."

"Ees, sartain. 'Tes something to look to."

"Then there is to be an operation?"

"Oh lor! they've orpirated, and 'tes no use at all."

I was puzzled.

"They think you will come round in time?"

"Oh—they thinks nort. 'Tes the Word o' God say it."

I was silent.

"It stand'th in the prophet Izee: 'In that day shall the deaf hear the words o' the buke, and the eyes o' the blind shall zee out o' obscoority and out o' darkness.' I shall zee my Patty then."

"Aye, Thomas Coleman, thim blind eyes 'll zee Patty then," acquiesced the short man, "and as I be gawn hard o' hearing myself, that appli'th to me too. Thomas Coleman, he's my brother-in-law. He married of my sister Patience, you know."

I was interested in these two old men.

I said, "You have your dinner boiling in the pot, and I'm detaining you from it."

"'Tes our dinner," answered the short one, and added with that graceful courtesy which is a characteristic of our agricultural labourers, "If 'twarn't such terrible poor trade, us 'd ax'y to have a bite wi' we."

"Delighted," I said promptly; "I have brought something here. My friend—one of the most unpunctual and aggravating persons in the world—has not turned up, and I do not relish eating in solitude."

"'Tes titties (potatoes), but you're cruel welcome."

"Then may I add my mite to the pot?"

I put my portions of cold roast goose into the cauldron along with the "titties." I was quite sure the old men would relish the addition.

The short man had not noticed my proceeding. He was engaged re-stuffing the pipe. The other was too blind to see anything.

"Now then, Brother Coleman," said the short man with the simple face, "let I light she, and smoke and think o' Patty."

He kindled the pipe at the fire, and after a few puffs, handed it to his brother-in-law.

The smell diffused from the pipe was peculiar. I snuffed and raised my eyebrows.

"No," said the childish man, observing my expression of perplexity, "her bain't fulled up wi' 'baccy. I reckon 'tes a coorious smitch (scent), but Thomas Coleman fancieth it. 'Tes just a little sage and ingin chopped up. 'Tes Goosie-Vair."

"Yes, Goose Fair in Tavistock," said I.

"Us can't afford to go to Goosie-Vair," explained the short man, "and if us cu'd our feelin's udn't let us, would they, Thomas Coleman?"

"No, I reckon, Methuselah Turpin."

"That's my name," said the child-faced man; "I'm brother-in-law to he. Patience Turpin wor her full name, but nobody niver ca'ld her nothin' but Patty."

"I think I'll go out in the garden, and feel how the bloody-warriors be comin' on," said the nearly blind man. Then he rose and walked to the door.

Bloody-warriors are gilly or wall-flowers.

"Thomas, my brother-in-law, be cruel took up wi' flowers," explained Methuselah. "Now he can't see 'em he can smell to 'em."

The old man began to tidy the room—already scrupulously clean; and then to lay a white cloth on the table, and some plates on it.

"Us be poor folk," he said apologetically, "but us 'll make you kindly welcome. So—and 'tes Goosie-Vair, and you bain't there."

"No!—I came for a walk on the moor—an inhuman creature called Blank—but there, never mind him. How long is it since your brother-in-law has been afflicted?"

"It's been a-coming on iver since our Patty died."

He talked as he prepared for the meal, hobbling about the room. He was not lame, but his knees were perpetually bent, he could not straighten his limbs, and there was a bend or a twist in his mind as well—it also was contracted.

"You see, your honour, vayther and mother they died when me and Patty was young. I wor the ou'der o' the two, and tho' folks sez as I be a bit tottle (silly), yet I cu'd work and arn my thirteen shilling and keep house; and Patty, her soon growed ou'd enough to be vitty (fitting = tidy) and spry (quick), and mind the house. I bringed she up, and her bringed up I, till Thomas Coleman come and took up coortin' she, and marr'd her. But it's been just the same ever since—I've lived wi' she and Thomas, after they was marr'd, and she has been dead these five year come Lady Day; and Thomas hev' been bad in his eyes iver sin'. Not as that had nothin' to do wi' it.

Her wor a peart (lively) little maid wor Patty, and I'm none surprised as Thomas Coleman took a mind to she."

"Any children?" I asked.

Methuselah shook his head.

Then he went to the door, and called his brother-in-law, who came in. Coleman was feeble in body as well as failing in sight.

He groped his way to the table, and took his place. Then Turpin poured out into a bowl the contents of his pot. He saw meat and bones of fowl of some sort, and said simply—

"It's chicking."

"No—not chicken," I said, with a smile.

No sooner had the two old men begun to eat than an expression of wonder, then of reverential awe, came over their faces.

"It's goose!" exclaimed Turpin.

"Goose, sure-ly!" echoed Coleman.

"Us haven't eaten no goose since *that* day, have we, Thomas Coleman?" said the childish man.

"Well, now," said the blind man, "who shall say as merickles be past?—and to-day be Goosie-Vair!"

"This is something better than a 'baccy bowl stuffed with sage and onions," said I, laughing.

"Thanks to you, sir, and to Him as brought you, sir," said Coleman. "So it be. But you see, sir, when I can't have goose—and I haven't set my teeth into one since *that* day—the smoke be better than nothin' at all, special since I've lost my Patty."

It was a pleasure to see the old men enjoy that goose. I was now thankful that my friend—that fellow Blank (confound him!)—had not arrived: thankful that I had come to the cottage, and had thought of slipping my lunch into the pot of the brothers-in-law.

When the meal was over, I found that their hearts were open, and that they were ready to make a confidant of me.

Now it was Thomas Coleman who took the lead in speaking, whilst Methuselah Turpin cleared away the relics of the feast.

"I don't mind tellin' of it now, your honour, as we be all friends together—not as there's ort to be ashamed on! The Lord presarve us!—but there be some soorts o' things folk don't like to tell to ivery one—things as they kip huddled up i' their hearts like treasures they don't let all the world zee. Then somethin' comes like thickey (that) mouthful o' goose wi' sage-and-ingin stuffin', and it unlocks the heart, and all comes tumblin' out. I don't mind tellin' of it, if, sir, you don't mind the hearin' of it."

"On the contrary, you could not do me a greater kindness."

"You mun know," said the blind man, after he had wiped his eyes, "I wor cruel took up wi' Patty, and right as I shu'd be. Her wor a proper dacent maid. That wor five-and-twenty year agone. Then I had my eyesight,—her wor nimble on her feet as a hare, and light o' heart as a gladys (yellow-hammer)."

Then Methuselah broke in.

"Brother Thomas Coleman," said he, "let me tell the genl'man about that. You comed a-coortin' o' my zistur, and I didn't half like it. Her and me had been very comfortable like together. Her'd looked arter me, and I'd looked arter she; and I didn't half like it when you, Thomas Coleman, wos always axin' me if I cu'd find my way all alone to Jericho."

The blind man turned his face to me and tapped his forehead.

"Methuselah be that simple," said he, "he don't understand nothin' about coortin'; he niver at no time went in for they May-games. Of course, I didn't want to have he hangin' about wheniver I comed over to see Patty, a-dragglin' along iverywhere wi' us when I took her out a bit o' a stroll. I dare say I may ha' axed he to go to Jericho at time or two; but, Methuselah! you was terrible provokin' at my coortin' time."

"I wasn't goin' to have none but a proper chap have my zistur," explained Turpin; "an' how wos I to find that out wi'out follerin' 'em iverywhere, and hearin' all they had to say the one to another? Us hed lost vayther and mother, and I thought it wor my dooty to look arter the maid."

"I reckon you a little over-did it, Methuselah."

"A chap can't be too partickler," said Turpin, gravely. "Tweren't as if I had a scoor o' zisturs."

"Well," pursued the blind man, "the coortin' went on wi' difficulties, just as well as two poor creatures cu'd, wi' Methuselah trailin' about, and niver for no minit out o' the way. At last comes our weddin'—Old Michaelmas Day, Goosie-Vair—and us—that's me and Patty—had a mind to make our honeymoon off roast goose. Patty and I was to drive into Tavistock, and ha' our bust on goose, and all to ourselves, lovier like. Will'y b'lieve it, sir, that there dratted Methuselah, he would come honeymoonin' along wi' we. Sed I to he, 'A goose, as every vule (fool) knoweth, be too much for one and not enough for three.' But, lor' bless y', sir! there were no movin' he—Methuselah be that stubborn when he takes something into his head. Sed he, 'Thomas Coleman, I knows as my zistur hath a tremendjous small apertite, and the goose 'll do very well between us three.' It's o' no use argifying wi' the likes o' he." The blind man touched his brow significantly, and shook his head.

Then the short man broke in. "Thomas Coleman, he said to I, 'Don't y' think, Methuselah, you'd better get your ticket and go to Jericho?' Then I sed, 'I'm not a-gwan', Thomas; for why? Because I don't know for sartain they keep Goosie-Vair to thickey place you call Jericho, and I know they do to Tavistock.' "

"Well," continued the blind man, "there was no giving he the slip. When us got to the 'Plough,' they wos uncommon kind, for they knawed us three wor out honeymoonin', and they gave us a gurt (great) big goose, so big as a turkey. We eat 'n, and had enough. Well, your honour, I've niver tasted roast goose from that day to this, exceptin' in my dreams. Us be poor folk, and can't afford 'n." Coleman wiped his eyes. "But, sir, wheniver our weddin' day cometh round, I just have a whiff out o' my 'baccy-pipe o' sage and ingins, and then I seems to be carried back to that theer weddin' day, when Patty wor so charmin' and Methuselah that terrible provokin'. However, I'll go on wi' my tale. Us returned from our honeymoonin'—that is to say, Patty and me and Methuselah—and Farmer Northmore had given me up this here little cottage to live in wi' my wife; and when I brought Patty here, nothin' would do but Methuselah must cum also."

"There now," protested Turpin; "what wor I to do wi'out my zistur? Her'd knitted my stockings, and baked kettle bread, and my pasty, and I couldn't get on by myself. When us came to the door, after our honeymoon, Thomas turned as red as a poppy, and said, 'For the last time, will you be off to Jericho?' But I answered and said, 'I don't reckon the farmers there be in want o' hands. They're all suited.' So I stayed wi' 'em, I did."

"And it was best so," said Thomas. "My dear wife didn't live long—only twenty years. O dear blood! I shall not see her again—‘not till the eyes see out o’ obscoority and out o’ darkness,’ as Scriptur telleth.”

“They may call me tottle,” put in Methuselah, “but I did the right thing. For when my zistur died, and Thomas became hard o’ seein’, who’d ha’ looked arter things, I’d like to knaw? Everything ha’ gone suant (smoothly) wi’ me. I’ve been doin’ woman’s work—bakin’, and washin’, and darnin’, and the likes.”

“That’s true enough,” assented Thomas Coleman.

A twelvemonth passed, and again came the Martinmas summer and the Tavistock Goose Fair. I had gone into the town, not to partake of goose, but in pure oblivion of the fact that it was “Goosie-Vair.” When, however, I did realise that it was this momentous day, then I recalled those brothers-in-law, and became desirous of seeing them again.

Alas! such had been the spin and tear of life, that I had not found time to go to them again through an entire twelvemonth. I had purposed doing so, but had always postponed the expedition—because of distance, because of business, because of pleasure, because of the weather, because of laziness. But now that Goose Fair Day was come, and had brought with it the same radiant weather as in the previous year, I merely baited my horse, and then drove on to Ward Bridge.

The woods were as golden and copper as they had been the year before, the fern was as russet, the mountain-ash berries as coraline, the guelder berries as carbuncle-like, and the sloes as turquoise in the bloom on their purple cheeks. The water foaming under the bridge waved the long black weed-tresses, the trout darted—just the same. It was hard to believe that a whole year had slipped away since my last visit.

I rode slowly up the steep ascent, turned at the corner, hitched up my horse at the gate, and entered the little garden.

All about the house was the same. Not the smallest token of change. Under the window were seedling wallflowers—"bloody-warriors"—ready to be set out for spring-flowering next year. The door was open. I tapped and walked in, and looked at the arm-chair. It was empty.

I tapped again. I could hear some one stumping about up-stairs, but he seemed unable to hear me. I waited patiently till he came down. Then I saw Methuselah Turpin, creeping along with legs bent, more clumsy and uncouth than before; and I speedily discovered that his ears had become more hard of hearing.

Where was his brother-in-law? He beckoned to me to follow, and he led me up the steep staircase, that was little better than a ladder.

When I had reached the chamber, I saw the bed, and on the bed a coffin. The old Thomas was laid therein, no doubt, but the lid was on.

"Her bain't screwed down yet," said Turpin, "but her will be present-ly. Would y' like to have a look? Thomas maketh a beautiful lych, that her do."

He stumbled to the bedside, and raised the lid. I saw the old man then. There was a little colour still in the cheeks and the lips. The blind eyes were closed. The face was singularly peaceful; it had a wondrous refinement and beauty in it. But I opened my eyes very wide at something I saw—at something that made me turn and look sharply at Methuselah, whose hand shook as he held the coffin-lid; and he said, apologetically—

"Well, sir, your honour, I thought as

my sister Patty would be main pleased. You see to-day be Goosie-Vair."

What surprised and shocked me was the sight of the pipe slipped into the dead man's mouth, between the dead lips. But that was not all. It was stuffed. There could be no doubt as to what was the stuffing—sage and onions!

"You see," said Methuselah, "to-day be Goosie-Vair. To-day twenty-six years agone my sister Patty married Thomas Coleman, and they—us three—kep' our honeymoon into Tavistock Goosie-Vair. Well, Thomas he sed I was a bit tottle, but for all, I don't think I be. He's agwan' to be buried to-day—Goosie-Vair—beside Patty, into Walkamton churchyard. He's gwan' to be laid o' one side, and I've made square wi' the sexton as I'm to be laid on t'other—her i' the middle—when it please the Lord to take me. And I thought I'd gi'e my sister a bit o' surprise and pleasure like. Her'll be walking in the heavenly garding — and all to once her'll smell a snitch o' sage and ingins, and her'll jump up like and say, ''Tes Goosie-Vair, and there be my Thomas Coleman havin' his pipe o' sage and ingins—sure as iver, it be he comin'; and her'll run to the gates and be the first to welcome he—comin' along smokin' of his pipe. I'm not so tottle—not I."

A year later—nay, rather more than that—and the little cottage was deserted. Methuselah, grown very deaf, had departed, and was laid on one side of his sister. There is a headstone to all three, and on it the text—

"'In that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity and out of darkness.'—Isa. xxix. 18."

THE HAMMETTS

The river Plym, after leaving the moor at Cadover Bridge, descends rapidly through a gorge the sides of which are of rock, interspersed with dwarf oak. In spring the loveliest of gold green is mixed with the most delicate of silver greys into the most harmonious whole. But perhaps among the rainbow changes of colour, the fairest phase is in August, when the moorland above the trees is in full bloom of the heath and heather; then it is as though raspberry cream had been spilt over the tors and was streaming down the sides, running through every cleft, capping every rock, spreading over every slope, suffusing every sweep of down, the whole over-arched by the silvery blue sky.

Here and there a gorse-bush shoots forth as a burst of flame through the mantle of pink that is pure, sweet as a maiden's blush.

This same wave of rosy lilac flows down upon and runs in among the oak coppice, and drives forward and downward the rank bracken, that is thrust to the river from under the shelter of the dark green oaks, and is already touched with frost or premature decay, and changing through every range of tint from sap green to old gold.

Below, the Plym boils and tosses over rocks, here by its spray nourishing an emerald patch of moss that caps a boulder, there foaming into a pool shot through by trout black in body, and cooling the feet of the great royal osmunda that stands tall and rich at the margin, with its cinnamon flower scathes now in ripeness. Perched on a stone under the osmunda is the blue kingfisher watching for a trout sufficiently small to become his prey, and the wagtail is "dish-washing" on a flat stone in mid-river, without any concern for a meal, as the tiny gnats are thick in the air as motes in the sunbeam.

The mighty rock that shoots up precipitously from the river is the Dewerstone, and it marks the junction of the Plym and the Meavy.

On the other side of the river the precipice is less bold. A bridge crosses the combined waters and scrambles up the moorside to

Shaugh, the granite tower of whose church shoots boldly against the sky, and pricks it with its pinnacles.

At the very water's meet stood a cottage called Grenofen, and at the time of which we are telling, it was occupied by a couple of the name of Hammett. Job Hammett was a man of over seventy, stooping, with his head on one side, and a pointed nose, from the point of which brow and mouth and chin receded at an angle of sixty degrees, giving him very much the appearance of a bird. Bird-like also was the way in which he hopped about, twitched his head from side to side, and flapped his arms. There was a somewhat sly look in his small eyes; lines were deeply drawn from behind each nostril that crossed the jaw and met under the chin, giving a sardonic, ill-natured expression to his features.

His wife Bell Hammett was a fine woman, well compacted, heavy, not in flesh only, but in bone as well; with very fair complexion, barley-sugar-coloured eyebrows and hair of head; the latter always beautifully smooth, and maintaining its gloss although she was getting on in age, though fifteen years younger than her husband. Altogether a comely woman was Bell Hammett. She was scrupulously neat in her dress, scrupulously clean in her person.

It was the trouble of her life that Job was rummagy and untidy. He had to be made clean, put into order, bullied into tidiness. And Bell was just the woman to keep Job up to the mark. She had no scruples about using her tongue on him—no more than has a bear in licking her cubs into shape.

When she did this, Job was not slow to reply. She rated and abused him in a long-continued, loud, and harsh declamation; he answered by sudden and sharp onslaughts, and contrived in a very few words, shot in between her sentences, to strike the woman and wound her where most sensitive. These retorts only made her worse, more angry, more abusive, more extravagant; but they served as a relief to Job, and a gratification to his malice.

This couple led a most unhappy connubial life. They were ill assorted, they showed each other no love, their time was spent in annoying one another, in mutual recrimination.

There was one particular song which Job loved to hum, or to whistle, or to tap with his fingers on the table, that peculiarly aggravated her.

Isabella Hammett had been brought from a populous and cheerful neighbourhood to Grenofen, when Job married her, and she felt the loneliness of her life in the wood at the foot of the great rock, with no one nearer than at Shaugh, to which she must climb. She was then a lively, agreeable young woman, and was much in request as gossip at baptisms, and she had a passion for funerals. No one in any parish round could die and be buried without Isabella Hammett going to the interment, and weeping copiously over the grave and through the service that committed dust to dust and ashes to ashes.

There was a young butcher who on one occasion, and one only, escorted Isabella Hammett home from a funeral. He had been a bearer, and wore his most glossy black and whitest pocket-handkerchief, and most lugubrious face, and most double Day-and-Martined boots.

Job took it into his head to be jealous, to throw out hints that Bell was carrying on with the butcher. He believed that she got her meat from him only that she might flirt with him whenever the meat cart halted on Shaugh Bridge; that the "Ho! ho!" which the butcher shouted from his cart on the bridge was not so much a call for Bell to come out and choose a joint or take in tripe, as a summons to an affectionate *tête-à-tête.*

That was thirty years ago, and now the butcher was married and had a dozen children, and Bell had stood godmother to half of that dozen, and had wept over the graves of three which had died. The butcher no longer came round with his cart. His son who was in the business did that.

Nevertheless, the old grievance of that walk home with the butcher in his bearer's garb was still a topic of irritation and strife between Job and his wife. She had for some years given up attending little domestic festivities; nevertheless, the accusation that she was a gad-about was cast in her teeth on all occasions. And, as a gentle reminder that he had something against her, Job would hum or rap or whistle the tune of "The old man can't keep his wife at home," when he did not speak, and yet desired to annoy her. And, it must be allowed, the air of this song was one of a peculiarly irritating nature; at least, Bell Hammett considered it so.

The song was never sung through in its entirety in her presence. If it came out, it was in a fragmentary condition, and it was sometimes interpolated with allusions to the butcher in black, which did not concord with rhyme or metre.

As Job Hammett has long ceased to sing the song in snatches, indeed to sing it at all in this world, and if he is singing elsewhere, is certainly *not* singing this, I will venture here to transcribe it.

> "The old man can't keep his wife at home,
> She dearly loves abroad to roam.
> She chooseth to eat the daintiest meat—

Here was interpolated, "Got of that mourning butcher"—

> "And leaves the old man the bone.
> Herself must have good cheer,
> Herself drink humming beer,
> A merry life lives she,
> For her heart is full of glee.
>
> "The old man's wife went out to dine,
> And left him tucked in bed at home.
> She was dressed so fine, she tippled red wine,
> Her face with pleasure shone.
> She capered and she danced,
> She like an ostrich pranced,
> And she sang, 'There's none so free
> As old men's wives can be.'
>
> "The old man began to crawl, and coughed ;
> Above the door he set a stone,
> Then sat and quaffed gruel and laughed,
> Till spasms made him groan.
> His wife so late came home,
> Then clattered down the stone.
> It fell on her head
> And it knocked her dead."

Then, with a volley of hammering of fists on the table, and kicks with his feet, Job would roar out the chorus :—

> "The old man don't keep a wife at home,
> Not one who dearly loves to roam.
> Odds bobbins ! my life ! Of gad-about wife
> The old man now has none."

Matters went on in this wretched fashion for thirty years, getting worse rather than better. At first each was, as it were, trying his or her weapons, feeling the other's side for vulnerable points; years of girding at one another had made them perfect masters of hurting and incensing one another. At last it became intolerable to both. After a continuous engagement that lasted three days and three nights, without a break, when each was raw and wincing, or bruised and aching—when the temper of each was flaring at white heat, then both came simultaneously to the conclusion reached by the *blasé* man of society, that life is not worth living.

"I shall commit suicide," yelled Job.

"So shall I ; that's the only way to be rid o' you," screamed Bell.

"Go and ax the butcher to lend you his sticker," sneered Job.

"Go and smother yourself in dirt," jibed Bell.

"I won't hear another word from you," raged Job.

"Nor I from you," retorted Bell. "I shall starve myself to death."

"So shall I," said Job.

"I shan't do it in the house, lest you should enjie the sight," said Bell.

"Do it anywhere, so long as you do it," answered Job.

"I shall go into the wood across the river," said Bell, "and die there."

"No, you shan't; the butcher 'll come and feed you as the ravens did Elijah. I'll go there."

"Then I'll climb Dewerstone."

"Do it—only begone."

Accordingly these miserable beings left their house, one in one direction and one in the other, fully resolved to commit suicide, each by abstention from food. Mrs. Hammett scrambled to the summit of the Dewerstone, and there, panting and very hot, threw herself down in the heather. Mr. Hammett hopped, bird-like, from stone to stone in the bed of the Plym till he reached the further side, and then he crawled away into the depth of the coppice and cast himself among the fragrant bracken.

Bell Hammett was greatly exhausted; she

was so hot and her wind so short that for a while it was to her real enioyment to lie on the heather, look up into the depth of sky, and think that *that* was where her husband never would be. It was a place reserved for herself.

What an ill-used woman she had been! For thirty years she had been the wife of that mean, spiteful, grubby old Job, had toiled for him, had mended for him, washed for him, baked for him, and all she got in return was abuse.

Why had she taken him? Never had she committed a greater mistake, never done anything she rued more bitterly. What if she had not married Hammett? Was it not possible that the butcher—"Never mind about the butcher," said Bell. "He is far out of my reach as yon liquid, lovely star," and she pointed to Venus, then just showing above the horizon, for the day was declining. "It's a sin to think of the butcher," continued Bell, "now I'm on the threshold of eternity."

She put out her hand, plucked a couple of whortleberries, and put them into her mouth.

"How Job has gone on about that butcher, all these thirty years, and I'm sure I gave him no occasion—that's to say, nothing so very partic'lar; but he might ha' overlooked it, in thirty years. Men is onraysonable; wimmen is poor sufferin' martyrs."

The light began to fade out of the sky. To the west was a wondrous glory, and against that, the peaks of the Cornish moors stood distinct and sharp.

"There'll be rain to-morrer," said Bell, "when the Cornish tors be so distinct. Lawk-a-dickey! If I be to starve to death, I'd rayther do it dry. 'Twill be terrible tryin' if rain cometh on."

The glow became less. An amber cloud turned dull and lost its gold, changing into lead.

"Deary dimmity!" said Mrs. Hammett, sitting up. "There's Job's Sunday shirt; there's a great piece tore out o' the tail; the wind on Tuesday did it as it hung on the cord; the wind and the clothes-peg did it, and 'tain't mended." She lay back again. "It don't matter, though," she said to herself. "Job's not like to want it where he's going." That thought comforted her for a while, but only for a while. She sat up again. "I should be ashamed, after I'm dead and gone, that folks should find Job's shirt with a hole in it—tore and never mended; and Job, he'll never ha' done slappin' at me in kingdom come over that tore shirt, that is, if iver we meet, from which presarve us."

She threw herself back in the heather.

Rooks were flying overhead. They had been on the moor; they were returning to observe the condition of their nests, whether much injured during their holiday after rearing the young.

"P'r'aps they may want that there shirt to lay him out in!" mused Bell, putting up her head. "Oh dear! it's begun workin'. I didn't have my cup o' tea this arternoon, and so weren't proper fitted up for starvation. That's unfortunate; but I begins to feel hunger a-ravenin' in my in'erds."

There was twilight in the sky after the sun had set. Dew began to fall, and Bell Hammett to be chilled. She lay very still for some time, sighing, vexing her mind over that cup of tea she had not taken in preparation, when suddenly a thought darted into her mind like the stab of a stiletto.

"Jemminy-crikey!" said she, sitting bolt upright. "That rabbit-pie in the larder!"

Bell remained semi-upright for some minutes, shivering with cold and the void internally, and concerned over this precious rabbit-pie.

"Whativer is to be done?" asked Bell of vacancy; "there's thunner in the air, and for sure her'll niver keep to our buryin'. It'll take three days killin' us wi' starvation, and then, I reckon, about five days till us be taken to be buried. The rabbit-pie 'll niver keep till then."

What a prospect!

"Drat it," said Mrs. Hammett. "There's a lady-bird creedlin' over my face, and another, I reckon, rampagin' in my hair. I don't likes this soort o' thing, and I'm terrible holler in my in'erds. That there rabbit-pie—" She paused, shivered, sighed, and said, "There's a hard-bi'led egg cut up—and there's sliced chives, and the jelly all set—oh my!"

She drove the lady-bird from her hair.

"I do make good pastry—that I do. 'Tis a cruel shame thickey (that) rabbit-pie should go bad. It seems a sin like. And if I be goin', as I be, out o' this world, it won't do to go wid a conscience burdened, and burdened it will be should thickey rabbit-pie turn bad before the buryin'."

She drew herself together.

"It's cold—terrible, and there, I've been and got prickles o' fuzz into my hand. 'Tain't that I mind, though—it's thickey rabbit-pie."

She stumbled to her knees.

There was a light in Grenofen.

"Whoiver hev been that wicked to come burglin'—whilst us hev been preparing ourselves for eternity?" asked Bell Hammett, in great excitement. "And, I shouldn't wonder, hev got at the rabbit-pie. I'll spoil their little sport."

Down the Dewerstone went the woman faster than she went up, swinging herself from one tuft of heather to another, and never staying till she reached the cottage, when she threw the door open, rushed in—no one was in the kitchen—plunged into the larder, and found Job there, engaged in eating the rabbit-pie without knife, fork, or spoon, using only fingers.

"You mouldy old crumb!" she cried. "You dirty, ontidy creetur—how dare you!"

And here the veil may well be drawn on the scene of mutual recrimination—and mutual consumption of the rabbit-pie.

For some time, as may well be imagined, the rabbit-pie formed a subject of jibe between the pair, and displaced the butcher of Shaugh. There ensued as little harmony as before, and after six months the annoyance became so great, the sense of misery so acute, that again Bell Hammett declared her intention of destroying herself, not this time by starvation, but by the surer and more rapid action of the halter. She could endure the vexation of her husband's conduct no longer, his heartlessness, his cutting speeches, his slights cast on her character, the utter hopelessness of relief in this world.

Snatching at a stout rope, she flung from the room, declaring that she would hang herself from the apple tree behind the pig-sty, and that she laid her life to the account of Job, who had taken from her existence everything that could make it tolerable. With her bosom rising and falling and her heart in a tumult, a fire in her brain, Bell threw the door to behind her and strode across the back court.

The pig, hearing her step, grunted.

"No—no wash. You have had it!" said Mrs. Hammett, bitterly. "And who will give you the pail to-morrer, goodness only knows." She halted for a moment. "And what nastiness Job may put into the pail for you, that also goodness only knows."

In the still evening air the savour of the sty was strong.

Bell passed the door, and thought—"For the last time I smell a pig-sty. There'll be no pigs where I'm going." Then she stepped back for another whiff, not that the savour of a sty is particularly agreeable, but man values what he is about to lose and never, never, never regain.

"I shall eat none o' your black puddings," said Mrs. Hammett as the pig again grunted. "Job 'll have 'em all, and enjoy 'em—disgustin'."

She went out to the apple tree, and threw the end of the rope over the only limb available.

"Now," said she, "I don't see clear how to do it. I must have a barrel out to stand upon. I niver did it afore, and so it don't come nat'ral like."

She went to an outhouse where was an empty cask, and with some difficulty removed it from the lumber that encumbered it, and trundled it out through the court to the apple tree.

"I wonder whether the branch will hold," said Bell. "I mind last year there was such a sight o' apples in some orchards that the boughs broke."

She planted the cask in position, but now found a difficulty in mounting it. The cask being light and she being heavy, it upset with her when she attempted to scramble to the top. To spring cat-like on to the end was beyond her powers.

"I'll go and get a stool," she said; "I'll niver get up on end of thickey barrel no other ways."

She returned to the house with the rope round her neck; being a tidy woman she held up the end, and did not allow it to draggle.

Job had lighted his pipe, planted himself in front of the fire, with his knees expanded, hands also, absorbing as much of the heat as he well could. He had the fire all to himself.

He looked round, and without removing the pipe from his mouth, thrust it with his tongue into one corner and said with the other—

"What, not hanged yet?"

"I can't wi'out the steppin' stool," she replied. "And, Job, mind the curing of the pig; it's three weeks in salt, and unless you turn the sides ivery day and pour the brine over, they'll niver keep."

"All right," said Job. "Go on and hang yourself. I'll mind the pig."

"You bowld unfeelin' paycock!" said Bell in a rage, and swung out of the house, carrying the stool. On reaching the apple tree she placed the stool beside the barrel, and after a couple of ineffectual efforts, managed to balance herself on the cask-head. Then she threw the end of the halter over the bough, and, laying hold of the end of the rope, jumped off.

Her weight whisked the cord end out of her hand at once, and she came down in a sitting posture, much shaken, under the barrel.

Jarred, frightened, hurt, she gasped, and found her husband standing over her, engaged in releasing her neck from the halter.

He was still smoking.

"You stoopid!" said he. "Don't'y know that I've promised to take the calf to your butcher to Shaugh to-morrow? I shall want the halter for *that*."

Mrs. Hammett sprang up with an exclamation.

"What, Job! You comed out here not to save me from death, but to get the ou'd halter for the calf! I'll teach you to valy your wife so little."

She had the halter off her neck in a moment, had laid hold of Job with one hand, and was belabouring him with the rope with the other.

She was the stoutest of the two, altogether the best man of the two.

Job danced, writhed, entreated, swore—in vain. The cord whirled and fell. He winced and struggled and screamed—"Let go, Bell!"

"Let go! indeed. So you came after the rope; not because you loved and valyed your wife, but because you wanted it for the calf. I'll teach you to love and valy your wife."

"I do! I do!" shrieked Job, capering. "Oh, Bell, you hurts terrible. Oh, don't. I'm cruel tinder about the loins."

"I will—till you ses you came out of love—out of love—and nothing else."

"Oh, I did! out of love—love—and nothing else. Strike me dead if I didn't."

"And valy me!"

"And valy you above fine gold."

"Love and valy—both!"

"Love and valy!" repeated Job.

"And ever will!"

"Till death!" said Job.

He kept his word. He could not help it. If he showed at any time a tendency to deviate, to allude to the butcher, to warble a certain strain, to contradict, to be dirty in his person, untidy in his proceedings, insubordinate in thought or word or act, Bell looked up at a cord that hung from a nail and might have been mistaken for a bell-rope, and Job returned to the path of docility and amiability at once. So the latter end of this married career was better than its beginning or middle.

JOLLY LANE COT

George Hannaford was as fine an "up-standing" young man as any on Dartmoor. Not that he lived on the moor. On the contrary, his home was at Walkampton, on the edge of the moor, but he worked throughout the week at a mine in Swincombe where tin was found, and returned home every night when the week's labour was over, unless the weather was very bad or very fine, and then he slept at Swincombe in an outhouse, should the whether be cold, and under a rock in the open air, should the weather be warm. The distance was not in reality very great—not more than eight miles; but then, for one half of the way there was bald moor to traverse without a track, and should the waste be enveloped in dense fog, should rain be descending in streams, the direction might easily be lost, and George wander for miles out of his proper course.

Moreover, eight miles after a hard day's work is like the last straw to a camel's back; and eight miles taken homeward on Saturday evening implied eight miles in the early hours of Monday morning, perhaps through streaming rain, with a hard day's work after it.

But this may explain why in very bad weather George Hannaford did not return for the Sunday to his home, and yet leave unexplained why he often failed in fine weather.

The reason had to be sought in Brownberry, an ancient tenement on the Ashburton road, occupied by a farmer named Yole under the Poor of Brixham, who were his landlord.

In Yole's employ was a fresh, well-built girl of the name of Eastlake. She was not a moor girl exactly, but came from Holne, a parish contiguous on the moor—one, indeed, that had a large tract of common land on the moor, but not the "forest."

George Hannaford had cast an eye on Martha Eastlake. If he remained in Swincombe over a Sunday, it was certainly rather for the sake of having a walk and a talk with Martha, than because he was afraid of bad weather and losing himself on the moor.

That George Hannaford should marry the girl did not suit the minds of several persons—not, for one, of her master Yole, who found the girl handy, willing, and industrious, and had no wish to lose her through marriage or any other way; not, for two, of Hannaford's captain, for he thought that should the young man marry, as there was no house available on the moors into which he could carry his bride, his bride would carry him away somewhere else, and he would lose the most valuable man he had in the mine; not, for three, of Simon Simms the moorman, who had set his will on the winning of Martha. A moorman is a man who has taken a quarter of the moor from the Duchy of Cornwall, and is responsible for the sheep and cattle turned out upon the waste to pasture and graze through the summer. Every parish that is contiguous on Dartmoor has what are termed "venville" rights, the right to feed sheep and oxen and horses on the moor, the right to cut turf for fuel, and take stone for building. Properly, Dartmoor belongs to all Devonshire, but the Duchy has endeavoured, and endeavoured successfully, to cut away the rights of all parishes to go to the moor for what is wanted, excepting only such as immediately adjoin the moor.

Forest rights were granted to Edward the Black Prince on Dartmoor—that is to say, it was to be a chase for the Princes of Wales for ever, where they might enjoy the hunting of the red deer without prejudice to the communities which possessed rights of pasturage, and of taking from the moor everything they required except *vert;* that is to say, green oak and venison.

The Duchy of Cornwall, held by the Prince of Wales, now claims much more extended rights than were granted it; it claims these in virtue of holding the lordship of the Manor—when acquired, unknown—and it endeavours by all means to extend these claims to land that is in the purlieus of the "forest."

The forest of Dartmoor—a forest without trees—is divided into four quarters, and over each quarter is placed a moorman. The venville tenants turn out their ponies, bullocks, and sheep on the commons, and the moormen demand a certain sum for every beast thus turned out. The sum is small, and the moorman undertakes in return that the beast shall be recoverable, and that no wilful damage shall be done to it.

Now the Duchy exercises the right of "Drift," that is to say, without given warning to drive ponies or bullocks to some pound in the quarters of the moor where the drift is carried on, and there the venville tenants demand their beasts, and others pay a fine for their beasts being found on the moor.

But the Duchy is not content with driving the forest proper, and it makes claims, that are stoutly resisted, to drive the drift on the tracts of moorland that surround the forest proper.

Simon Simms was moorman for the south-eastern quarter. He resolved—or the hint was given him from higher quarters to try—to drive the Holne moors. Accordingly, suddenly, unexpectedly, one morning, to the braying of a great horn, Simms and a number of men he had collected appeared on the moors of the Parish of Holne to drive them, and exact a fine for every head of cattle found thereon. This created at once resentment among the farmers and little men of Holne, and they turned out in great numbers to resist the Duchy officers.

Now whether it was because Martha Eastlake was a Holne girl, or whether it was because George was a Walkampton man, with a hereditary grudge against the encroaching Duchy, or whether it was that Simon Simms being on one side, George Hannaford out of purposeful opposition took the other, I cannot say; but directly it was bruited at Swincombe that Simms was driving Holne Moor, and that the Holne farmers were out to resist the drift, a party of Holne miners, and Hannaford with them, hasted to the scene of contest to defend the rights of the commoners and repel the invaders. A sharp engagement ensued, in which sticks and whips and even pistols were used.

In the affray, Hannaford sprang at the bridle of Simms' horse, and endeavoured to thrust the moorman back; his foot slipped in the scuffle, and Simms deliberately rode over him.

He was rescued, with leg and thigh broken.

Months elapsed before he was able to resume work, and then was left to a slight extent lame. He never after wholly recovered the breaking of his thigh.

Simon seized the opportunity whilst Hannaford was laid by to make his offer to Martha, and he was mortified and incensed by her refusal of him.

The conduct of Hannaford in the affair

of Holne Moor Drift was not favourably viewed by the farmers on the forest. Having vast rights on the moor, they desired with pardonable selfishness to reserve these to themselves, and to extend the area over which they could turn out their cattle. Accordingly they were heartily in sympathy with the Duchy attempt to extend its rights over the contiguous commons.

Hannaford had interfered in an uncalled-for manner. Moreover, he had been the occasion of a slight being offered to Simms, by a girl who should have been thankful to pick up his whip for him when he dropped it.

No sooner was Hannaford well than he resumed work at the mine, and attendance on the girl Eastlake. His lameness precluded his walking home to Walkampton, and he sought for lodgings in some of the cottages—they were few and far between—and had much difficulty in obtaining shelter.

He had his and Martha's banns called at Walkampton and Holne Church, and to enable the latter to be done, Martha trotted home every night for two weeks to sleep at her father's house. For the forest of Dartmoor is in the parish of Lydford, and the church at Lydford is something like sixteen miles from the farm in which Martha was working. It was well enough to prepare to be married, but, when married, where were they to live? Hannaford was earning good wages at Swincombe, and did not desire to leave his employment. There was absolutely no house available in the neighbourhood. There was no chance of obtaining a bit of land from the farmers, on their tenements, for they were all opposed to having a new settler among them. To think of asking leave of building on Duchy land did not occur to George. He knew that Simon Simms would oppose that by every means in his power.

What, then, could George Hannaford do?

The banns were called on three Sundays running, and unless the marriage followed within three months, then the banns must be called again.

What, then, was to be done?

Birds cannot mate without a nest; and man and woman cannot marry without a home. Yole desired to retain Martha at Brownberry, and threw difficulties in the way. Like a simpleton, she had not given due notice of leaving, consequently she was held to service for a month. The captain at

Swincombe suddenly advanced Hannaford and increased his pay. He urged him on no account to leave; he held out to him the prospect of succeeding to the captainship, as he himself was thinking of going to another mine.

The matter was talked over among the miners, among the labourers on the moor; it was commented on among the farmers and workpeople of Holne, who could not forget that Hannaford had fought and suffered to maintain their rights. The day of the wedding was fixed, and the young couple had not a house to go into.

The day was — as it chanced — that of Ashburton Fair—the first Thursday in June, one of the best and most generally attended fairs in the year.

A lovely June day—the sky cloudless, the air elastic, birds singing, the wild rose—crimson—in full flush in the hedges.

The young people walked to Holne to be married, and as they walked were passed by the moor farmers on their horses, or in their rough traps, and had to encounter many a joke and jeer. It was really too absurd—this young miner hobbling to church to be married without having a roof to offer his bride to cover her head. The ceremony over, whither would they go? The burly farmers laughed as they jogged along, and nearly fell from their horses, they laughed so boisterously.

The last to pass was Simon Simms, and he looked at the happy couple with a malignant sneer. Then—no one was on the road.

And now ensued a sight most remarkable.

From every quarter, over down and tor, along the road, across new-takes, came men and women all making for one spot—a bit of wild furze-grown common a little above Huckaby Bridge over the Dart. The men were armed with picks, levers, "physgies." The women carried hoes and reaping-hooks. Not a farmer was near, not a Duchy officer.

Then ensued a spectacle of combined activity and of rapid work such as has not been seen on the moor since. Men went to the tors and rolled down great stones; they split up such blocks as they could not move; whilst the women reaped down the golden furze, and dug up the sweet turf in the form of a long parallelogram.

Next — when a great accumulation of stones had been brought together by the roadside, they were levered and carried to the spot cleared by the women, and laid in order two by two, forming foundations, and next a little turf was inserted in place of mortar; then again stones, rude and unshapen, were dexterously fitted into place, and walls sprang up as by magic. Space was left for a door, then for windows; long slabs of granite formed threshold and jambs and lintel.

And now—what is this procession coming from Holne? It is a train of men dragging beams, cut from the Holne woods and rudely shaped, to serve for rafters.

And who are these coming over the moor with laughter and song?

A party this of moor-maidens, who have been reaping rushes wherewith to thatch the house, and who come now singing with the bundles on their heads, on their shoulders, under their arms.

What merriment! What good-humour! What hard toil! What indefatigable labour! —till all is finished. And who are these old people coming in a cart down the hill from Brownberry? They are strangers to this region, they are very old, very infirm, and they are full of amazement at what they see. Who are they?

At this moment, from the opposite direction, comes the young married couple. You cannot hear the Holne bells, for Holne is far away; but as they come you can hear the cheers and the joyous shouts of men and women and children, welcoming George Hannaford and his wife Martha to *their house and home.*

And George runs to the cart approaching from an opposite direction—with a shout to welcome to their home from the poor-house his father and mother, whom he had maintained at Walkampton by his labour. The crowd with smiling faces, and the women with tears—tears of pleasure—separates, and forms a passage, down which Martha passes, enters the door, goes to the rude hearth of flat slabs of granite, and kindles there the first fire.

Then rises a deafening cheer. Not the Duchy, not Simon Simms, not all the farmers on the ancient tenements, can remove George Hannaford and his wife Martha.

That house—built in one day, occupied the same night—remains unaltered to the present moment.

In Mr. R. Burnard's first series of 'Dartmoor Pictorial Records' is a photograph of the house, and accompanying this is the account of its origin.

"Jolly Lane Cot is an illustration of land-cribbing from the Duchy by one of the small fry. This picturesque little cottage was erected in a single day, about fifty-five (now fifty-nine) years ago. Preparations were made beforehand of the requisite material, and taking advantage of the absence of the farmers, who had all gone off to Ashburton June fair, the labourers on all the country-side came down and lent a helping hand, and in one day the walls were up and roofed in, and by nightfall a fire was burning on the hearth."

The custom formerly was, that if land could be fenced in, or a house built and occupied between sunrise and sunset, no one could displace the occupants. And Jolly Lane Cot was the last instance of this custom being put in force.

GREEN RUSHES, O!

Young people—the rule is all but invariable—run together like globules of quicksilver. There is so much mercury in their veins, gravitation is so fundamental a law of nature. The difficulty is to keep them apart, not to bring them together.

But human nature is capricious. There is no hard-and-fast rule with that; whatever general law may be thought to govern it, exceptions will be found, and among these phenomena—these deviations from the normal—were Tom and Jenny.

These were just the two who would not and could not be brought together. Their natural instincts, not inclinations, drove them apart, and not all the efforts of well-meaning friends and relatives, not all the thrusting and nudging in the world, appeared likely to give the impulse to these two to make them come together as they ought, and as they wished.

There was the oddness of the situation—it lay in the last words of my last sentence. *As they wished.* Tom had the greatest admiration for Jenny, but it was so excessive that he was shy of being with her—he adored her, but from a distance; and Jenny considered that there was no young man in the universe so far as she knew it—and she knew no more of it than is comprised within the bounds of the forest of Dartmoor—no young man at all worthy of being desired, like unto Tom; but then so great was her respect for him that—she ran away from him. If the two passed on the high-road, an awkward salutation was all they accorded each other—a grunt and a slouch of one shoulder from Tom, a movement of the lips to form the words 'How do'y do now, Tom?' from Jenny, but not the words themselves. If it should so happen that Tom saw Jenny ahead of him, walking along in the same direction, then not all the king's horses nor all the king's men could draw on Tom to hasten his steps and catch her up. On the contrary, he immediately jumped a wall, ran over a field, jumped another, made a vast loop of at least a mile, always at the run, and came out on the road again half-a-mile ahead of Jenny.

Now it happens that on Dartmoor there is a little church near the Dart, newly constructed, in which a curate ministers once a Sunday. Precisely because Jenny went there for her devotions, not moved by any theological differences and doctrinal scruples, Tom frequented the Bible Christian chapel. He had on one occasion been played a trick on leaving the little church. The congregation, seeing him issue from the sacred door alongside of Jenny, immediately fell apart; some hurried forward, some hung back, with the kindest sympathy possible, to allow of Tom offering his arm—at all events his company —to Jenny on their way back to their several homes, which were close to each other. But this consideration on the part of the fellow-worshippers in the church so agitated Jenny, and so alarmed Tom, that she ran and clung to the side of a farmer's wife going her way, and Tom turned tail altogether, and walked to Holne in a direction diametrically opposite to that which he must ultimately pursue.

There can be no question but that, as a general rule, we are all inclined to believe to be true that which we hope to be true. But there are exceptions to this rule also, and precisely Tom and Jenny proved exceptions.

What was obvious to every one else, what was certain to every one else, was precisely that on which each was sceptical. All the neighbours knew that Tom was madly in love with Jenny, and that Jenny could fancy no other lad than Tom; that, not to put too fine a point on it, they were cut out for each other, and for no one else. But this was what neither could be induced to believe.

There was absolutely no impediment why these two should not be joined together in holy matrimony. The banns might have been proclaimed from the top of every tor, and no one would have forbidden them. On the contrary, they would have been hailed with acclamation. The only impediment existed in themselves; they would not come together.

Tom was an active, industrious man, a miner at Vitifer, who came up out of the shaft red and rosy in garb as well as in face from the tin ore; he earned his sixteen shillings a week, and had a little cabin of his father's construction in which he lived with his sister, near the King's Oven, where in ancient days the tin was run into blocks and stamped with the royal mark.

Jenny was the last remaining maiden in a wooden barrack erected by the proprietor of the Vitifer mine, about which barrack a word must be said. When a new lease had been taken of the tin rights at the head of the Webburn, then a long shanty of wood, tarred black, had been erected by the manager, who had considered that girls might very well be employed in sorting ore. He had engaged a dozen and a half, and had lodged them in this shanty under the supervision of a respectable matron. But the scheme broke down, because human blood is of the nature of quicksilver; the miners and the maids ran together and made pairs, and there were marriages one after another, till within a twelvemonth the shanty was cleared of all the lasses except Jenny; and the matron had no other work to do than look after Jenny, who of all girls least needed looking after, for she ran away from the only man for whom she cared, yet not half so fast as he did from her.

Now Tom's sister was impatient to get away. She did not love the life on the moor; she desired above all things to take a situation in Torquay, which is as lively a place as invalids can make it; and consumptive people have more craving for excitement and amusement of every kind than those who are healthy. Such is human nature.

The frolicsome invalids who frequent Torquay have made it a very elysium for house and parlour maids; and Tom's sister had before her the golden dream of a lively winter at Torquay, and a sleepy summer there, when the invalids are departed, and the servants have nothing else to do than disport themselves on parade and lounge, and to boat and carry on with the boatmen and railway porters.

Moreover, the matron at the shanty was impatient. The manager of the Vitifer mine was impatient. The former desired to be in some prospering concern, and not a failing one like the barrack for maidens; and the latter did not see the advantage of paying and maintaining one whole matron, of expensive respectability, for the sake of one girl only.

Consequently, it would oblige and relieve three persons if only Tom and Jenny would come together. But they were willing and prompt to do—just anything but that.

Jenny was an orphan; had no one to consult but herself. Tom was without parents; he had no one to consult but himself. "Why the dickens should they not make a match of it?" every one asked; but no one could give an answer, except the captain of the mine, who, quoting Artemus Ward, said: "It's downright sheer cussedness and nothink else."

What on earth prevented Tom and Jenny from speaking to each other right out of their hearts? Precisely because each felt so strange in his or her soul, or heart, or mind, or all three together, that neither quite knew what was the matter. Only now and then, on the still moor, when the sun was shining, and the blue shadows—blue as cobalt—lay motionless on the distant hills, and Tom had stolen away from his mates to eat his dinner alone in the heather, did he lean his head in his hand and say: "Darn it all, I can't get her out of my mind."

And only when Jenny went to her bed, and laid her head on her pillow, did she sigh out to herself: "Oh dear! I do like Tom tremendous!"

Each took the most elaborate precautions to conceal from other eyes what was in their minds. Neither mentioned the other's name, and if a third spoke it out, then Tom or Jenny, whichever it was who heard the other spoken of, had a flutter of the heart, and a colour in the cheek, and looked away from the speaker, as if what was said did not interest at all, and yet listened with both ears. This went on for a whole year, and each confidently believed that no one had the smallest conception of the love that consumed each heart. But it was perhaps because each rather overdid it that every one came to know of it.

Then, at once, all set to work to bring the two lovers together. Most earnest in her endeavours was Joanna, the sister of Tom. At one time she had disliked Jenny for no particular reason, but now she cultivated her acquaintance, invited her to the cottage, walked with her, and wormed her way into her affections. Then all at once out popped the words: "I say, Jenny, you are cruel fond of my brother Tom, bain't you now?"

"I—I—I—— Get along!" answered Jenny, flushing to the temples.

"You need not deny it," said Joanna; "I have eyes as well as another, and I can see it as distinct as I can the rocks on old Bellever Tor. You're terrible took up wi' my brother Tom."

"It bain't true," answered Jenny, the tears of vexation filling her eyes. "It's a scandal to say such drashy stuff."

"It is true; and what I know also is,

that Tom worships the very ground you tread."

"That's false," answered Jenny; "for he rins away from me wheniver he sees me, jist for all the world as if I were a long-cripple (viper)."

"He does love you, I vow and protest."

"He's got a queer way o' showing it, then," retorted Jenny, and that was, Joanna was fain to admit it to herself, an unanswerable argument against her proposition.

After this conversation Jenny kept away from Joanna; their friendship had had a douche of cold water thrown on it, and she would neither walk with her nor salute her. As she said to the matron, Joanna had insulted her.

After a lapse of three weeks matters were patched up between them, and Joanna again broached the subject. Again Jenny refused to be convinced. As she said to herself: "What am I? I'm nought but a poor maid that ha'n't got no belongings. I've been left behind when all the other maidens got married, 'cos none would have me; and there is Tom, as straight and stiff a chap as any in the works, and has laid by a lot o' money, folks say—and there aren't one of the mining boys as has married is fit to hold a candle to him. Git along with yourself for an idjot, Jenny, for thinkin' he can care a fardin' for you."

Joanna also attacked her brother. "Tom," said she, "here am I slavin' as a nigger, and all for no wages but pure love, and, as you know very well, I want to be off into service to Torquay. You are holding me here on to this desolate moor, where one sees no faces lookin' in at the winder but that of a bullock or a sheep or a Dartmoor colt, and I wants to be off—terrible. You're aged twenty-seven, and ought to be married, a great hulkin' chap like you. If you'd the feelin's of a man, you'd die o' shame!"

"Shame at what, Jonah?" He called her Jonah as the short for Joanna.

"A chap o' twenty-seven and not married! I say it's reg'lar scandalous; and all the county cries shame on you."

"But who'd have me?"

"Why—bless the boy!—Jenny."

Then Tom turned away from his sister, and went out to wash himself of the pink soil that was on his hands from the tin mine; and as he washed he said to himself: "Jenny have me! The prettiest, tidiest, peartest (liveliest) maiden was iver seen since Eve! A chap like me—all mucky with chrome and clay. Git along for an idjot, Tom, for thinking such things."

This did not answer. Then the manager of the Vitifer mine took the matter in hand; so did the matron of the shanty. The master said to one of the miners who was single: "Bill Hawk, I wish you'd do me a favour, and I'll give you five bob."

"Yes, sir; what is it?"

"Look here, Bill; I want you to walk out that girl Jenny, gallivant with her a bit, and——"

"But, sir, I'm taking on with Mary Bolt, down to Chagford."

"Never mind—only just for a bit. There is that confounded fool Tom won't see that he must have Jenny; and if we can make him jealous, it might work."

Bill Hawk considered a moment and said: "Well, sir, if Mary Bolt was to hear on it, she'd be in a dowse of a rampage; but if you'll make it seven and six, I'll try it on."

"I don't object to another half-crown, Bill. So be it."

On her part the matron invited a niece to the barrack, a very lively, dark-eyed witch of a girl, and she brought her over to the cottage of Joanna, who at once took to her and contrived means of throwing her and

Tom together, and the matron and her niece talked much of Tom and his nice cottage, and his garden, and his savings, before Jenny. But this also failed. Jenny would not be walked out by Bill Hawk, would not say a word to him; and the niece had not a chance with Tom, who, if he saw her in the cottage, made a run and went off elsewhere. So passed another year. The matron had given notice, and the barrack was to be closed; Jenny would be obliged to shift for herself, and whither should she go? Joanna had become desperate, pining for the frolics of Torquay, and had announced to her brother that she had engaged herself in a situation, and that he must shift for himself; she was not going to be an "exile of Siberia," not for him nor any one—not another winter. If he wouldn't marry——

"Then I must take a housekeeper," said Tom.

His sister stood back aghast.

"A housekeeper! You, an unmarried man! A housekeeper! Goodness gracious me! what is the world coming to?"

"If she's old and ugly," protested Tom.

"No woman does think herself old and ugly. She will lay traps and snap you up. Goodness gracious me! Here's a fine kettle of fish!"

"What else can I do?" asked Tom despairingly.

"Marry," answered Joanna.

"It takes two to do that," said Tom disconsolately.

"Yes, of course it does. It doesn't take three, nor four, nor half-a-dozen, but two only. Go and speak to Jenny."

"She runs away from me."

"Run after her."

Tom shook his head and walked away.

"Tom," said the captain of the Vitifer mine, "I want you to do a job for me to-day."

"What's that, cap'n?"

"We must have the shed thatched afore the fall-rains come on, and I've borrowed Potter's wagon. I want you to go up by Cranmere and get me rushes, green rushes, to have it properly roofed in. It ought to have been done last year, but there were other things coming on, and there had been such a lot of rain that the bogs were well-nigh impassable. But this year we have had such drith (dryness) that you can get out a long way. Potter can't let us have a man, but we are welcome to the wagon."

"Yes, sir, I'll do it. But I must have some one with me to load."

"I know. Potter will let us have Joe Leaman, the boy; he'll do, I suppose?"

"Oh yes; any boy, or girl either, would do for that. It is only to pack the rushes in the cart as I chuck 'em up."

"Very well, take Joe."

Accordingly, that day—a lovely day it was—Tom went to the farm and got the cart, and Joe somewhat sulkily helped Tom to put the harness on. The horse—there was but one—and a wagon would pass along an eminently precarious and rugged track.

"I say," observed Joe Leaman, "it's Chagford Fair to-day, and there's a circus, there is."

"Well, what of that?" asked Tom.

"Why don't y' go and see the jumpin' tomahawkin' Injians, and the hostriches racin', and the piebald pony as sits at a table and smokes? I would if I was you."

"I have my work to do, and I can't."

"I'd cut work if I was you."

Tom vouchsafed no answer and drove out of the farmyard and along the track into the depths of the moor.

"Look here," said Joe, "I can cut along over the hill in no time, while you're going along the way."

"Well, cut along."

Joe disappeared. He did not, however, go over the hill, but slunk back to the few cottages near Vitifer, and came on Jenny.

"I say, Jenny, you're a good 'un, you be."

"What do'y want now, Joe?"

"Look y' here, Jenny, I'm off to Chagford Fair, and there's hostriches and jumpin' kangaroos there, and a piebald pony as drinks beer like a fish—and my master hev ordered me to load rushes out by Cranmere."

"Then I reckon you must go."

"No, I won't. But our cart be started, and I want some one to take my place. Do'y now, there's a honey, Jenny. I know you've a holiday, 'cos of the fair; so you can, and it ain't fair as I should be made to work, and want to be off to Chagford, and you got nothin' to do, and don't kear about fairing."

"I'll go," said Jenny, who was very good-natured; but she said: "Who is with the hoss? Who's going to cut the rushes?"

"One of our chaps," said Joe. He had that cunning in him which prompted him not to say that Tom was with the cart. He knew that, had he told the truth, Jenny would have been too shy to go. "You're thunderin' good," continued Joe. "Now look here; you cut along wi' all your legs over that stretch o' moor yonder, and you'll come down on the other side upon the roadway and see our cart wi' the grey mare, going out to the bogs about Cranmere; you can't miss it. I'll give y' a kiss and thanks, Jenny, if you like."

"I'll have the thanks wi'out the kiss, you monkey," said the girl; and without suspicion of deceit, away she went, singing like a lark, across the moor in the direction indicated. She went as the crow flies, whereas the cart had to go on a track that followed a valley and then turned round a long shoulder of down, strewn with hut circles belonging to an ancient settlement in a prehistoric age. She had full three miles to walk before she could expect to catch up the cart and the grey mare.

As she walked, wading through the heather, in every flush from carmine to palest lake, she sang for very joy of heart, and yet joy mingled with an indescribable yearning—

"I would I were a sparrow,
To light on every tree;
At eve, at night, and morning,
I'd flutter, love, to thee.

And as the ship went sailing,
So lightly I would fly,
And perch me on the topmast,
My true love thence to spy.

"I would I were a gold-fish,
And in the sea did swim;
At eve, at night, and morning,
I'd follow after him.
Then o'er the bulwark looking,
He'd say, 'What see I there?
A fish all golden, shining,
Like a lock of my love's hair.'"

She stooped—at her feet was a clump of white heath—and she picked some and put it in her bosom. To find white heath betokens luck, it is said. Having arranged her little posy, she went on singing—

"I would I were a flower,
And in a garden grew
At eve, at night, and morning,
Whene'er my love passed through.
And if you plucked and wore me,
Upon your heart I'd lie,
And breathing forth my fragrance,
Upon your heart I'd die."

She sang to a plaintive minor air—an air that was in itself full of tears; and as she sang, the sad words of the sad melody took the brightness from her mood and left an inarticulate longing therein. She surmounted the hill and saw the white mare gleam in the sun, and the flash of the scythe of the reaper who was to cut the rushes. Who he was she could not discern, as he was on the farther side of the cart.

She hastened her steps. She ceased singing, as she had not the breath for it now. Presently she came up with the cart, and, still not seeing who was on the farther side, said: "Joe has gone to the fair, and I've told him—little monkey—I'd take his place. Is that you, Simon Jeffries?"

Then Tom looked up and across the cart, and Jenny started back in dismay; but so also did Tom.

Tom was angry; he thought a trick had been played on him. Jenny was ashamed; she thought Tom would consider her pert, forward.

So they walked along, one on each side of the cart, neither speaking.

That was a long, tedious journey. The cart bounced about like a boat in a chopping sea. Of road there was absolutely none. The wheel on this side bounced over a great stone, then that on the other was heaved up over a hummock of turf. Wretched as the track was, it was an old one. As Tom walked along with his eyes on the ground, he saw something, stooped, and picked up a flint arrow-head—a thunderbolt, he regarded it—and put it in his pocket. To find a thunderbolt is as sure a prognostic of good luck as to discover white heath.

At length at noon the great desolate dark waste was reached where the rushes were to be cut. Before beginning operations, Tom unharnessed the horse, and then returning to a nodule of dry peat at some little distance to the right of the stationary cart, pulled out his lunch, sat down, and began to eat.

Jenny had not brought any food with her. In the hurry of starting she had forgotten to provide herself. She withdrew to some little distance to the left of the cart, found a tuft of rushes, and sat down on that and folded her hands.

Tom had eaten the greater part of his pasty before he looked in her direction. The cart was between them, but by leaning backwards he could just see her across the back of the cart-wheels. Then he observed that she was fasting. He got up, went to the cart, and taking out a little white bag, carried it to her and said: "Here's Joe Leaman's dinner; eat that." Then hastily he retired to his former position, or rather to his former place, not position, for he altered the latter. Instead of sitting sideways, he turned his back on the cart, and of course thereby turned his back also on Jenny.

So he munched on. In the great desolate swamp at the spring head of the river was no pure, no potable water, but Tom had brought with him a flask of cold tea. If he had not taken this with him, what would he have done? How could he have gulped down his dry pasty?

Now turning his head over his shoulder, he looked to see what Jenny was doing for lack of water. He couldn't see, because the cart was in the way, so he came up to the cart and peeped cautiously from behind it, and saw that she was quite unable to proceed with a very dry hunch of saffron cake. After some hesitation, he took up a piece of feathery moss, wiped the mouth of his bottle, and went over to the girl, handed it to her with a "There: pull away; 'tis tea," and then turned and fled. Ten minutes later he stretched himself, took his scythe, and began to reap down green rushes; and as he reaped he sang—

"Don't y' go a-rushing, maids, in May,
Don't y' go a-rushing, maids, I say.
Don't y' go a-rushing,
Or you'll get a brushing,
Gather up your rushes, and go away.'

He sang defiantly, to show that he was not thinking of Jenny or of any one else.

After he had been engaged some time in cutting, Jenny came and bound up in bundles the green rushes he had cut, but always at a considerable distance from him, and ever as he went ahead he sang out—

> "Don't y' go a-rushing,
> Or you'll get a brushing,
> Gather up your rushes, and go away,"

with great emphasis on the *go away*.

At last sufficient had been cut and bound to fill the cart, and then Tom harnessed the grey mare and put her in between the shafts, and drove her along to where lay the little bundles.

Then with a jerk of the chin and a sign with his thumb, Tom indicated to Jenny to get into the cart, which she would not do till she had restored to him his bottle of cold tea, in which was some still left; and of this Tom at once took a pull without wiping the mouth with moss, and then blushed up to the roots of his hair, fearing lest Jenny should have seen him and read the thoughts of his heart, that he was putting his lips where had been hers—and was happy.

All went on very silently, the loading with rushes, and the arranging them in the cart. Tom considered how many "niches" (bundles) of rushes would be required for the thatch. He had been told, and he now took more, lest the thatches should fall short and it would be necessary to come out to the mere for more.

The cart was piled up high, and on the top of the pile of green rushes sat Jenny, by her weight to hold them in place. It was true a rope was slung across, but the "niches" were so short that it could hardly nip them all. It was necessary that some one should be in the cart to keep them in place. Then "Gee up, old grey!" called Tom, and they started on the return journey.

All went well for some while, slow indeed, but without accident, so long as the track lay over heather and moss. But when the tracks became deeper and revealed gravel and white lumps of granite, then the oscillation was great, and the voyage attended with danger, not only to the cart, but also to its lading. All at once, down went one wheel on the side opposite to Tom, and he thought the cart and all its contents must capsize.

Quick as thought, he dived under the cart and came up on the farther side, just as the whole pile of rushes tilted over, and with it Jenny, who was on the top. Beyond, at his back, was a bog—profound—treacherous. In the terror of the moment, in his impossibility to escape, Tom remained where he was, held out his arms, and into them fell Jenny, and with her and over her and him poured the green rushes, burying them and almost smothering them.

But with a struggle, up through the rush "niches" came the two heads of Tom and Jenny; and odd enough to relate, Jenny in her alarm had thrown her arms round Tom's neck, and Tom had Jenny fast in his arms.

"Lor' a-mussy, Jenny!" said Tom.

"Well, I never, Tom!" said Jenny.

The moor folk who had been to Chagford Fair, and had seen the circus, the ostriches, the tomahawking Indians, the piebald pony that smoked a pipe and drank beer, and who had paid sixpence for the privilege, on their return in the evening saw a still more interesting and novel sight, for which they paid nothing. This was none other than Tom and Jenny coming off the moor walking hand in hand, talking to each other so hard that they heard not nor saw the number of people collected on the road to observe them and comment on the sight.

They had been brought together at last, and now could not have enough of each other. The rushes did it.

I knew Tom and Jenny some years later, when Tom and Jenny were no more two, but one flesh; and I never knew, nor could hear tell, that they had any difference with each other, except over this one thing.

"You know, Jenny," said Tom, "'twas you jumped into my arms."

"Now, how can you, Tom!" answered Jenny. "You went under the cart, so mad was you to catch ho'ud o' me."

"I—it was the rushes I wor thinking on."

"And I—I were tum'led down by the rushes."

"Well," said Tom—and I was told that the little altercation always concluded in this way—"well, Jenny, there was a power o' folks: there was my sister Joanna, there was that matron to the barrack, there was the cap'n—lor'! they was all of 'em on to bring us together; but they couldn't do it. What mortal men couldn't do, the green rushes did, and say I, and always will say till I dies—the Lord's blessin' be on the green rushes as grows on the moor for bringing us together—as they did."

AN OLD CROSS

On a long ridge of moor, a thousand feet above the sea, that forms a spur of Dartmoor, running out into the rich umbrageous land below — like certain characters that retain their innate savagery though surrounded by the sweetest culture—stands a very ancient cross—so rude, so shapeless that it probably belongs to a hoar antiquity, unless it were carved in the Middle Ages by a man who was an abject workman.

It is of granite. It is covered with a crust of lichen, yellow, white, and black. It is so shapeless that some daring antiquaries have suggested that it was a prehistoric menhir that was hacked into a rude cross to give it consecration from heathen rites. Whatever its origin, it is a curious object; and long may it remain looking down out of its grey lichens on the golf-players who have invaded this tract of down. But a quarry has been opened near it; and year by year those engaged in supplying stone for the roads approach nearer to the venerable cross, and menace its stability. That its existence has been menaced before, these pages will declare. That the menace came to nought is obvious, because it stands still.

The Abbot of Tavistock one day passed that way on his mule. "Upon my word, that cross is clean too ridiculous," said he, in the vernacular of the fourteenth century, which I do not attempt to reproduce, as vernacular never was written down save in farces; and there are no farces extant of that early period to tell us what the popular slang was.

"I think, Brother Augustine," pursued the Abbot, "I'll have it broken up and a new and respectable cross erected in its stead."

"Can't do it," answered Brother Augustine.

"Why not?"

"Because it is a *cross*."

So it escaped on that occasion. Abbot Robert wouldn't have it said of him that he was like a Saracen or a Lollard who destroyed crosses. So he let it remain. The cross ran a more serious risk of destruction at the period of the Puritan domination. Then the intruded Presbyterian minister at Tavistock was—was—but there, I cannot tell you his name, because he did not destroy the cross.

On the opposite side of Dartmoor is the village of Manaton. There also at this time a cross stood, in the churchyard, and when corpses were carried to burial, they were conveyed three times round the cross. The spiritual shepherd thought that a bit of arrant superstition; he preached against it —all in vain. Then one night he smashed the cross to pieces, and threw the fragments away, none knew where. The execration of his parishioners preserved his name—Carthew. *That* name is not forgotten, but the name of the Vicar of Tavistock who tried to destroy this cross and failed is forgotten, because he failed. And it is about that failure I am going to tell you.

Good, painful Master—I can't tell you his name for reasons aforesaid—was a burning and a shining light. In Tavistock Church he had cut down and destroyed a magnificent screen of carved oak richly painted and gilt; he had broken all the windows in which were figures of saints and angels, and he had carried off the Royal Arms to serve as a dresser in his kitchen.

But if in his Puritanical zeal he had done away with certain things of beauty if not utility in church, he had introduced one article which was eminently useful — an hour-glass—or rather a rack of four, so contrived that one told the quarter, one the half, the third the three-quarters, and the fourth the whole hour that his discourse was predestined to last. On these glasses his congregation fixed their eyes on Sunday, and drew relieved breaths as each column of descending sand came to an end. Each marked a division in his sermon, which was always composed of four parts, the first and last parts being somewhat curtailed to afford an introduction or a peroration, and the whole were so timed, extenuated, padded, and puffed out as to fill the space of one hour. Now the painful Master —— had harangued one Sunday for the space of one hour upon the topic of the old cross. *Firstly:* it was a relic of Popish superstition. *Secondly:* superstition was to be avoided by godly men. *Thirdly:* it was the worship of Apollyon. *Fourthly:* that cross was the very seat and throne of Apollyon himself, who not only sat on it but curled his tail about it.

On this last point the preacher was particularly strong. He thumped the pulpit cushion, he roared, he drew lively images of rhetoric, that would have made his audience jump like fleas, but that it was a fourthly, and those who were not asleep were fidgeting in their pews to be off to their dinners; and their minds were turning yearningly towards beef-steak pudding or shoulder of mutton and onion sauce.

Nevertheless the sermon made an impression. It was talked about far and wide. In the peroration the preacher had exhorted his hearers to destroy utterly, "hip-and-thigh" he had said, this cross; but the expression was not quite suitable, as crosses have neither hips nor thighs, only arms, and this particular one had a trunk as well.

Now that portion of the discourse which was most commented on was the daring assertion of the godly Master —— that the Prince of Darkness sat upon the cross and curled his tail round it. The curling of the tail about it must be admitted to have been a rhetorical flourish, and was introduced by the orator to give a sort of stability to his figure of the Personage in Black seated on the cross. But that this same personage did make thereof his throne he held most assuredly. As for the curling of the tail round it, that was an assumption; it might be, it very probably was so, but it was not *de fide.*

In those days when very few persons were able to read, when newspapers did not circulate, then a minister was thought much of because he was a scholar, and his assertions carried considerable weight.

"Ded ye ever see the old Scratch up a-top of thickey cross, now?" asked one old woman of another.

"Never in all my born days," answered the crone addressed.

"But ye know some one must have, or the pass'n wouldn't ha' zed what he did."

"No, I reckon. But I've never zeed nort, and I've been by there many times."

"What, of a night?"

"Not oft of a night for sure." Then, after a pause, "Well, now I come to think on't, there was one terrible moonlight night I did pass that way, as I were going to Moortown, and I zeed something black run along, and it did seem to be climbing up the cross. But sit at top—no, I never. I thort at the time 'twere my shadow. But ye know we're all fallible creaturs, as the minister saith, and I may ha' been mistook for sure sartain."

"Very like. There must be truth in it, or her (*i. e.* he) wouldn't ha' zed it."

Now at the same time in the "Wool Pack" two men—farmers—were discussing the same topic; the name of the one was Lillicrap, and the name of the other Cudlip.

Said Lillicrap to Cudlip: "Show it me in Scriptur', and then I'll believe it."

"I don't reckon that Scriptur' ever mentions Tavistock: but then there must be something there, or the minister wouldn't ha' zed it: I reckon he ain't set up there in thickey pulpit to gammon us."

"If it ain't in Scriptur' show it me with my eyes."

"You're an unbelievin' Thomas," retorted the other. "I reckon if you'd go there a night or two about St. Mark's Day or All Saints', you'd see it."

"There be no Saints' days now."

"Not with the new ministers under the Commonwealth, mebbe, here on earth, but the sperrits and powers o' darkness keep 'em all the same, I reckon."

"I'll not believe," roared Lillicrap. "Here, fetch me another glass o' ale."

"Then you ort," roared Cudlip; "and you—fetch me too another glass o' ale, and us 'll proceed wi' the argiment."

On Monday the painful minister rubbed his hands and said: "We shall see! I'll give them this day, even this Monday—it will be down to-morrow; so mighty is the word in my mouth."

On the Tuesday he said, rubbing his chin, "Verily we shall see; my flock hearkeneth to the voice of their pastor—whether with alacrity or sluggishly, we shall see."

Then he took his hat and stick, and proceeded to the down and trudged through the heather, and occasionally stooped to pluck whortle-berries and put them into his very large mouth—so large that in it one tiny whortle-berry was like a mere swab in the maelstrom—and at last he surmounted a rise, just as he had put another whortle-berry on his tongue, and lo! there stood the old cross as it had stood for many hundred years.

The minister had an exercise that evening in the church, and the elect who attended were rated soundly for not carrying out the injunctions given on the previous Sabbath. But on account of the whortle-berries he had eaten, what principally engaged the attention of his auditory was the blackness of his mouth and tongue; indeed, so taken up were they with this, and speculating on its origin, that the subject of his exercise passed almost unnoticed.

Next day the pastor did not go up to the down—he would give his flock time to execute what he had ordered. But the second day he rubbed his chin, wiped his eyes, and said, "We shall see! we shall see! Verily and indeed, we shall see!" and ascended the down, trotted at a quick pace through the heather, too quickly to notice the whortle-bushes, and too impatient to stop and pluck and consume the berries.

But no sooner had he surmounted the rise that commanded the spot where the old cross had been planted, than he saw it, gleaming golden in the evening sun against a background of purple moor. This was too much. In the worst possible temper consistent with the sacredness of his character, he hasted home.

"We shall see," said he, grimly. "Aye and verily, we shall see. I will even now go and do it myself."

So saying, the reverend pastor looked out a pick and bar, put them over his shoulder, and started again for the down. The hill he had to mount was steep, and his shoulders were unaccustomed to bear greater burden than the charge of his parish. Consequently he found the weight of the pick and bar onerous. First he carried them both over his right shoulder, then both over the left, then divided them, and laid the pick on the right and the bar on the left, then again made a shift and reversed the positions. None were quite desirable, and his large mouth went down at each end, with an expression not altogether angelic. The hill was steep, he panted, the sweat ran off his brow, his great mouth gaped like a poacher's pocket when empty. He had to rest, lay the tools in the hedge, and lean back among the fern and fox-gloves, wipe his bedewed face, and growl out some words that were not benedictions. He was angry with his sheep, that they were so inattentive to his exhortations, but he was most angry with the old mottled cross that had occasioned this discomfort and humiliation.

"We shall see," said he, and his lip quivered with fatigue, anger, and resentment. "We shall see. O thou dissolute" (he meant desolate, but was so excited that he did not hit on the right word)—"thou dissolute old cross, I'll grub thee up! I'll topple thee over! I'll bang thee about and break thee in sunder!"

Then he went on his way.

He waded through heather, trampled on the purple berries of the whortle till his boots were dyed as though he had waded in gore. And so—at last came within sight of the cross.

"Oh!" said he, "there thou art; looking as audacious as ever. I'll speedily humble thy pride. I'll lay thee even with the dust."

So he stumbled on, occasionally tripping among the harsh branches of the heath, and coming down on his knees, once even on all fours.

At length he reached the cross.

Then he looked about him. The day was closing in. Far away on the horizon the golden halo of declining day hung behind the range of the Cornish moors.

"Let me see," said he. "I can do it in half-an-hour, and be back before nightfall. What is that black spot there on the hill? If it be a countryman, then verily I will obtain his aid, and pay him with a piece of moral exhortation. However, I cannot await his arrival. I can but begin."

Thereupon the discreet and sober minister began work with the pick. He did not remove his coat, for he trusted that a labouring man was on his way to this point and would speedily relieve him of his labour.

He struck into the soil, and the pick

encountered stones. "Triggers," said the pastor, "set even to hold this same in position and firmly. I'll have them out, yea verily," and he renewed his efforts.

The stones wedged in round the base were firmly set, and he could not easily displace them. He went down on his knees and worked with his fingers, and scratched them.

"I will try the bar," said he. And he endeavoured to lever the stones out. One he did succeed in heaving forth. "Aye, in verity, this is hard labour to the flesh." Then he rose. "I will even see whether that man be coming, to assist my infirmity."

He turned, and what he saw made him drop the crowbar. A bull was coming at full gallop, plunging over the masses of furze, snorting, tossing his horns, and when he saw the pastor face round he uttered a bellow.

In an instant, in his terror, seeing there was not a moment to be lost, up the cross scrambled the minister, with an alacrity he had not shown since boyhood, and having reached the summit he seated himself with legs depending one over each arm of the cross, himself holding firmly to the head.

The bull careered round the cross, it

rubbed its horns against the stone, it looked up, it sought to reach the frightened man, and the pastor was fain to raise one foot, then the other, beyond reach of the brute, for the cross was but just sufficiently lofty to maintain him out of danger.

"Hush! hush!" said the minister. "Hush! away! avaunt! hush! Hush! Begone!"

But the savage brute was deaf to such exclamations, as indifferent as had been the congregation in the parish church.

"Depart, son of iniquity! Beast of Abaddon. I anathematize thee; go far from me!" shouted the man, curling his long legs round the cross. "Oh, my gracious! he has twisted his horns in my tail!" He meant the tails of his long black coat. With both hands he plucked at the flaps of his coat and drew them away, but in so doing almost overbalanced himself.

"You foul spirit!" shouted he, "I'll tell Butcher Edgcombe of you! I'll ask him to strike you between the horns with his axe. I'll order a round out of you, I'll have it salted, I'll eat it—I will, and enjoy it too!" He ground his teeth at the bull, leaning his chin on the top member of the cross. The bull galloped round the post, blowing blasts from his nostrils, and his breath reached the threatened man.

"See now," cried the pastor, altering his tone, "why should'st thou assail me? I am not edible. I am old, leathery, and without any succulence to speak of. Over the hedge yonder is Farmer Turpin's corn. There is a gap you can get through. That corn is most delicious food. No—no—my boots are tasteless, do not seek to devour them."

How long was this likely to last? The evening was coming on rapidly, indeed dusk was already setting in; below, in the valley, lay a haze over the river Tavy. Would he have to spend the night perched on this uncomfortable stone, unable to sleep, ever on the watch against the terrible animal that seemed possessed with intense animosity against him.

"See! see!" exclaimed the minister, "here is my kerchief. It is even red. Do thou disport thyself therewith and let me alone."

He let drop the piece of red material wherewith he had previously wiped his brow, and the bull caught it, tossed it on his horns, tossed it again as it fluttered down, got it entangled about them, ploughed up the earth with his horns to disengage them then, no sooner was he free again, than—just as the pastor was attempting cautiously to descend so as to make a rush and escape—he returned to him again, and up the cross swarmed the unhappy man in breathless terror, rejoiced, when he reached the top, to be again in security.

Then the bull threw himself down below the stone post.

"Merciful powers!" exclaimed the pastor, "he is going to spend the night here. Whatever shall I do?"

Then, to his inexpressible relief, he saw two human forms advancing along the turf road that traversed the moor. These two were Goody Blake and Margery Gloyne, even the same who had held the conversation already recorded relative to his sermon on the preceding Sabbath.

To them now the man shouted for assistance in his difficulty.

Now Goody Blake was carrying a basket of eggs, and Margery Gloyne had in her hand a bottle of cordial, elixir vitæ. Hearing the cry, they looked in the direction whence the sound proceeded, and saw perched on the cross a black, lean figure waving its arms. Instantly the words of the preacher recurred to them. Down went eggs and cordial, and the two old women ran as hard as they could run in the direction of Tavistock, screaming when they could scream—

"The live Apollyon, us ha' zeen him, wi' his curly tail crooked round the ou'd cross, and horns on his head, and breathin' brimstone."

The report spread. From out the public-houses came running those who had been drinking, with them Farmers Cudlip and Lillicrap.

"There now!" exclaimed the farmer. "You unbelieving heathen—come and see with your eyes."

"We'll all go," said the topers. "We'll all go," said the godly. "What our minister saith be very gospel."

In less than an hour full half the population of the little town was poured forth over the down to see the very live Apollyon seated on the top of the cross. Men, women, old, young, godly and profane. When the mob came in sight of the weird old cross of granite, it was nearly dark, but they could see some black object like an immense spider or raven, gesticulating, and they could hear it vociferating. They all held back in doubt.

Then the bull, alarmed at the approaching crowd, plunged through them, scattering them like chaff, shrieking, in all directions.

When the first panic was over, the bolder recovered courage and drew nigher.

"Drat it," said Lillicrap, "that's nought but my old bull got loose, and—blazes!—that up yonder is surely—our passon."

And so it came about that the cross on Whitchurch Down was not destroyed.

So also it came to pass that, whereas the name of the man who destroyed the Manaton Cross has been handed down and will never be forgotten, that of the man who tried to destroy the other cross has been forgotten, because forsooth he tried to do it, and didn't accomplish it.

THE END

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